John Byrom, F.R.S. (1691-1763): his religious thought and its relation to the movements of his time.

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A.R.Hubbuck, B.A., B.D.

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Preface

This volume endeavours to bring to life one of the forgotten men of the eighteenth century. The currents of history have very largely been determined by outstanding figures about whom much is known and much has been written. More obscure and smaller men have nevertheless some place in the great pageant of history.

John Byrom is therefore worthy of consideration if for no better reason than this, that the record of his very interesting conversations and observations upon life in general, throw light upon contemporary figures and events. From this record the salient features of Byrom's life and character will be presented. Against this background his religious thought on subjects which were prominent in the earlier part of the eighteenth century, will be surveyed. What had he to say about the burning religious questions of his time? What influence did he exert upon the men who led the thought and instituted the religious movements of the century? In what measure did he agree with such movements? These questions will form the basis of our study.

Chapter I

THE SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS OF THE TIME

To appreciate the life and work of John Byrom, to appraise its value, to observe its defects; it is necessary to look at the colourful background presented by the early part of the eighteenth century. The strongest character, no matter how masterful, is in some measure moulded by the influences which play upon him, he is the expression and part of his environment. At the same time, according to the power of his personality and thought, he is able to guide and alter the pattern of the forces in his environment. In short, he is not merely a product of history, but a maker of history. It will be our purpose therefore by putting John Byrom in his historical setting to find out how far he was merely an echo of his time, and on the other hand, how far he deviated from it.

The usual mental image presented to the mind when thinking of the eighteenth century has been very neatly described in "Johnson's England", as "a vision of beaux in coloured silk garments, drinking coffee out of small cups, while engaging in elegant philosophic small talk with ladies with towering powdered head-dresses and patched cheeks" [1]. One thinks of men and women of the 'smart set' being more concerned with the tinsel of life than with its substance, passing by pressing problems as though they did not exist, spending their lives like butterflies, caring more for fine clothes and superficial pretty sayings than for honest work and sound morals; an age of dandies and squalor. Planché in his "History of British Costume" quotes from Gray's Inn Journal No.8, 1752, an advertisement for an Auction Sale, which ran thus, "The whole stock of a coquette leaving off trade". It includes the secret of putting on patches in an artful manner, showing the effect of their different arrangement, with instructions how to

1. p.1 Edited by A.S.Turberville.

" place them about the eyes in such a manner as to give disdain, or amorous languish, or a cunning glance'. Translated from the French"[1] Could anything be more perfectly shallow? When set alongside the tremendous spiritual and social depravity of the vast majority of the population, its cold indifference is almost cruel. Yet if one is not to be guilty of taking the part for the whole, or of generalising from the particular, then this picture must be enlarged considerably. Referring to this popular conception of dandies and elegant ladies, G.M.Trevelyan says, "They occupied a relatively small part of the scene"[2]. Hence we must beware of any over-simplification of this bewilderingly interesting century, for many exceptions will be found to every generalisation.

It can be said of every era, that it is an age of transition, but in a very marked degree this is true of the period under consideration. In almost every branch of human expression very great changes can be observed. A century which began with the desire only for peace and quietness in everything in order that business might have the opportunity to flourish, was jostled and jolted into literary, religious, political and commercial revolutions. " The religious and political storms of the seventeenth Century had spent their fury, the social and political storms of the modern era had not yet begun to blow",3 but blow they did, in spite of the lack of idealism and of the spirit of self-sacrifice, the usual elemental requirements for any great change.

In the realm of literature the most illustrious names which ~~make~~ greet the century are those of Pope, Swift, Addison, Steele and Defoe, with their neatly balanced periods, their precise and polished writing. To the most casual reader it is apparent that their chief concern is not aesthetic, but intellectual. Yet before the century was out, the appeal of literature was made to the emotions, there was a return to nature and Romanticism. Prose and poetry became less frigid and cold, or as "The Cambridge Modern History" puts it "During the latter half of the 18th Century a fresh current swept through the literature of Europe".[4]

1 p.354 2. Johnson's England p.1. 4. Vol.vi. p.822 3. Johnson's England p.9.

In religious matters the change was no less striking. "Be not righteous over-much"[1] was an injunction readily heeded in the early days of the century. "Never was religion at a lower ebb"[2] is J.R.Green's comment. Scepticism, indifference and superficiality marked the approach to Holy things, of clergy and people alike. The religious trough into which the church had sunk was however, soon to become the crest of a mighty wave. The evangelical revival swept through England like a tornado, quickening the pulse and warming the heart of religion everywhere, for it was neither local nor merely sectarian in its effect.

In two directions there were very profound and far-reaching political changes in the 18th century. Queen Anne who ascended the throne in 1702 was a wily monarch, very zealous for the royal power. When George I succeeded her in 1713, his thought ran in German grooves, he was ignorant of English ways and politics, and he was immediately faced with a rebellion. All these factors placed the king very much into the hands of Parliament, and from 1721 Sir Robert Walpole exploited the situation to the full. Therefore, by degrees the power exercised by the throne was transferred to Parliament. There was also another change of emphasis in British politics, due largely to the influence of the French Revolution. The election of Members of Parliament was left in the hands of a very few influential people until the sunset of the century. Then ordinary citizens became restless for the reform of the franchise and in due course this agitation found expression in the Reform ~~Bill~~ Act of 1832.

Likewise in the region of commerce, the end of the century bore little resemblance to the beginning. Inventions in 1763 like Watt's steam-engine and Hargraves' spinning-jenny revolutionised industry and made the factory system possible. Thus towards the end of the century a nation which had been largely agricultural, rapidly became industrial in character.

Except in one direction, religion as found inthe Established Church during the first forty years of the century can fitly be described as lifeless. Rarely had the church enjoyed such a dominant position as it did

1. Ecclesiastes 7 [16] 2. Short History of the English People.

in the reign of Queen Anne; sovereign and parliament alike were eager to promote its interests. Yet in spite of these two factors of lifelessness and dominance, both of which usually tend to intellectual torpor, the bishops in particular, manifested a remarkable vigour in religious controversy. Butler, Berkeley and Warburton argued and wrote with a rare precision, for they not only parried the thrusts made against religion in their own day, but they forged weapons which have been useful to apologists in succeeding generations. If the other aspects of church life had approximated in any degree to the shrewdness of its defenders, truly this century might have been one of the most illustrious in ecclesiastical history. "Never since the Reformation had the Church of England given such fair promise of a useful and prosperous career as she did at the beginning of the eighteenth century".[1] This observation by Canon Overton is borne out by the wealth of apologetic writings of this particular time. It must also be said in its favour that the church shared the common disposition of the age to be tolerant; to quote from the Cambridge Modern History "One virtue - a rare virtue - the age possessed, that of tolerance".[2] This, no doubt, was due in part to the lack of religious zeal, but it was also a fitting and inevitable reaction to the bitter religious controversy which characterised the Commonwealth and Revolution. It was recognised that to crop an opponent's ears was a poor argument for one's case. Further, the calm, philosophical, somewhat detached, approach to religion would necessarily foster the spirit of toleration and a disposition to look at religious questions from every possible point of view. It is not surprising however to find the seeds of religious degeneracy in this splendid virtue, for mankind has found it very difficult to drive in harness the virtues of toleration and zeal. To change the metaphor, like a drunk man it has reeled from side to side, finding it difficult to hold the crown of the road, moving from one excess to another. Turberville writes, "Warburtons's watchwords were reasonableness and moderation. The Church of England, he believed, was in a perfectly healthy state so long as she purged herself of all

1. A History of the English Church - Overton & Relton 2. Vol. VI p.79

foolish aberrations, extremes and enthusiasms".[1] But it was the very lack of this dreaded enthusiasm which proved to be the undoing of the Church, for sweet reasonableness in so many instances, degenerated into lack of conviction on spiritual matters, which in turn prepared the way for a religion based almost entirely upon prudence. The moral essay took the place of the Gospel sermon, vigour and directness gave way to the glittering sentence which made no impression upon the heart or life. Discourses were sparing of emotion, and generally the aim of the preacher was to present some virtue as desirable and reasonable, it would be handled objectively and clearly, with the clarity of ice. Lecky declares, "Before the eighteenth century had much advanced sermons had very generally become moral essays, characterised by a cold good sense, and appealing almost exclusively to prudential motives".[2] In a sermon published in 1752 by Warburton on "the Office and Operations of the Holy Spirit", he endeavours on the one hand to meet and demolish the arguments of the freethinkers and on the other, to refute the position of enthusiasts or fanatics, no doubt having the Methodist movement chiefly in mind. Byrom immediately in a courteous, courageous, and convincing manner replied to this sermon in his "Familiar Epistles to a Friend". In the second of these letters there are some very revealing lines on the attitude of many clergymen to preaching and to the themes chosen for discourse.

"But were this all, and did not what he spake
Lead by degrees to serious mistake,
Taking a text for form's sake, to prepare
The Church to hear some Shop-renown'd affair -
Too oft the turn of the polite Divine! -
Would hardly merit your regard or mine".[3]

"Shop-renown'd affair" referring to some topic engaging the fleeting attention of the literary world. The hungry sheep looked up and were fed with the husks of worldly wisdom and good advice.

1. English men and manners of the 18th Century p.304.
2. A History of England in the 18th Century Vol.I p.105
3. Poems Vol.2 p.257.

In the ranks of the Dissenters too, lukewarmness was largely responsible for this feeble witness, the time spirit had gripped them so thoroughly that apart from Philip Doddridge and Isaac Watts, evangelical Christianity was but poorly represented. The spirit of John Bunyan and Richard Baxter was lacking in their followers.

Lack of unity among the clergy themselves must also be alleged as a source of weakness within the church, impairing its usefulness. Many of its greatest men believed in the Divine Right of Kings, and regarded an oath of obedience given to the sovereign, as binding. Hence, those who had pledged their obedience to Charles II or James II were unable, on grounds of conscience, to offer their allegiance to a new dynasty. The Non-Jurors as they were called, consequently were deposed from their livings. This was a serious blow to the Church, for it was deprived of more than four hundred clergy, many of whom were men of ripe scholarship and acknowledged piety.

However, a factor of much greater moment, which weakened the Church, was the system of pluralities. It was no uncommon thing for a clergyman to have more than one living in widely separated parts of the country where it was impossible for him to give efficient oversight to the various congregations, nor would he try to do so. This problem has always been present in the Church to a greater or less degree. Recognising that the love of money is still not completely rooted out of a man's nature when he becomes a clergyman, some of the branches of the Christian Church have legislated against its ministers accepting any other office or duplication of offices. Dr.A.W.Ward calls the matter of pluralities and non-residence "inherited evils which were at their height in our church in the middle of the 18th century".[1] Resentment against this exploitation of the Divine Call was felt keenly by those members of the established church who trembled for its preservation. Byrom was a High-Churchman of the best type, he loved its form of worship and was assiduous in attendance at its services, and his conception of the priestly office was lofty without being deferential. Hence, he, too, joins in protest by making a satirical reference to this

1. Poems Vol.1 p.272

particular iniquity in "Dialogues in the Lancashire Dialect". James and John, two members of the Church discuss the merits and demerits of preaching without notes, and in the course of the dialogue James is made to say:

> "Pairsons are paid; and if they win, may pay
> Thir Curates, John, to preach for 'um, or pray;
> And, then, they do not, when they ma'en a Raoot,
> Tongue it so mich as fling thir Book abaoot". 1

Rev.W.J.Townsend gives a striking example of this deplorable system "Probably the most notorious case was that of Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, ... he was Professor of Divinity at Cambridge and rector of Somersham in Hunts. Then he became the Archdeacon of Ely, and rector of Northwold in Norfolk. As if these were not enough, he was presented to the valuable living of Knaptoft in Leicestershire, but resigned the living of Northwold. He was then promoted to the See of Llandaff, being allowed to retain all the other preferments save the archdeaconry". 2 This, of course, cannot be regarded as typical, but the fact that such a case was tolerated within the church is evidence enough that the clergy sat lightly in the saddle of their responsibilities. Small wonder then, that a fair proportion of the clergy, especially those in the villages, made little attempt to be examples to their flock, they were lamentably lacking in both mental and moral equipment. Lecky quotes a tract written by Swift in which the latter says "His (the parish priest's) learning is much of a size with his birth and education, no more of either than what a poor hungry servitor can be expected to bring with him from his college." 3 Because ignorance among the clergy was allied to doubtful morals, the inevitable results in the Church followed in the form of a blighted religious life.

At no point in British history has there been such a dramatic transformation in social and religious conditions as occurred before the middle of this century. The Evangelical Revival changed the face of England, sweetened its social life, and introduced warmth and reality to religion. Such movements of the Spirit of God are always necessary in the life of a people, but rarely has the need been so clamant as it was in the early part

1. Poems Vol.I p.272 win = will 2. A New History of Methodism p.119
3. A History of England in the 18th century Vol.I p. 95.

of the eighteenth century. The rich, for the most part, lived artificial lives of extravagant luxury, while the poor wallowed in squalor and dirt. A scathing indictment was levelled against the British people by John Brown, a clergyman of the period, in his book "Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the times". It appeared anonymously in 1757 and immediately caught the ear of the public; it was a clarion call to a more manly way of living, for Brown accused his readers of being both cowards and scoundrels. Religion was at a low ebb and the life of the nation was hollow. No prophet of Israel was more vitriolic or nationalistic in outlook than Brown. The people were effeminate and factious, and in this, his judgment is endorsed by historians as being neither unjust nor intemperate. It is interesting to note that these strictures are brought only against the upper classes, the common people are omitted from them altogether; this is most significant. Even the most far-sighted writers failed to think of the nation in terms of the people as a whole. The gap between the two classes at this time was an unbridged chasm.

Although there was much to divide the rich from the poor, in two respects at least, they were alike, namely, in their taste for coarse amusements and in their inordinate craze for gambling. Fairs and wakes were popular throughout the country, and were the occasion of great dissipation. Bull-baiting and cock-fighting were enjoyed by all, and drunkenness and licence were part of a very depressing picture. The most gruesome amusement of the time, was the witnessing of public executions. The major portion of a town's population would turn out to see a person, maybe a child, hung for some trifling offence. Such was the depravity and coarseness of the people. Few pages in British history make more unworthy reading than those which tell the story of Admiral Byng's execution. Minorca had been lost, Byng had retired from action with the enemy, and the people were mad with fury. He was executed not as the result of impartial court proceedings but because of the humour of the times. Human life was accounted cheap, and men found a strange satisfaction in witnessing and imposing suffering on others. The sensitive soul of John Byrom revolted against such lust for blood,

and found expression in a short poem of remonstrance against such popular clamour. He describes the spirit of the time in these lines -

" ' But a merciful turn will be thought somewhat worse
In the ages to come ' - What a notion to nurse!
Of human condemners all history's pages
Secure, to the slow, the applause of all ages".[1]

The craze for gambling too, was like a fever, sapping the moral fibre of the country; as H.D.Traill puts it "The absence of intellectual speculation was made up for by speculation at cards, in lotteries, and raffles".[2] Even the Government itself from 1709-1724 raised large sums of money by lotteries, a licence could be taken out for a public gambling house, both peer and peasant were victims of this terrible vice.

In the higher reaches of society, this wantonness had its repercussions in the field of politics where corruption was rife. In this period of dim ideals parliamentary seats were bought and sold quite openly, and few voices were raised in protest. Lucrative positions in the government were open to the highest bidder. Strange as it may seem, society was smugly content with things as they were, to quote the Cambridge Modern History again "Society was perfectly self-satisfied and perfectly self-contained, and had not a new and mighty influence arisen to overthrow class barriers, the chasm between the few and the many might have given birth to a revolution".[3] A supercilious scepticism was also instrumental in deadening the religious susceptibilities of the smug upper classes. Philosophy was critical and destructive, revelation in religion was distrusted or largely ignored, and religion itself was almost wholly regarded as enlightened self-interest. The religious atmosphere was intensely chilly, and while the rich wanted the church as an institution to maintain its position in the National life, they were not at all concerned about the survival of the only thing which gives the Church any semblance of reality, that is, the Christian Faith. The latter they would dismiss airily with a pinch of snuff.

Yet, the greatest condemnation of the age must be found in the absolute depravity of the poor people. They were ignorant and brutalised,

1. Remains Vol.2 p.588 2. Social England Vol.V p.192 3. Vol VI p.78.

and scarcely regarded by their wealthy employers as being human. With unrealised riches of coal and iron under their feet, the great mass of the population eked out a miserable existence from the land. Wages for agricultural labourers were deplorably low, in some cases amounting to no more than 4d a day with food, or 8d a day without food, and even tradesmen could afford little more than the bare necessities of life. This situation, bristling with temptations for the unprivileged, encouraged them to plunder and rob whenever the opportunity presented itself. Highwaymen, not all of the courtly and gallant type, were a terrifying menace to travellers, and a street brawl, especially after dark, was the staged occasion for robbing the unprotected or unwary. No attempt was made to educate these unfortunate beings, and their ignorance was only matched by the depravity of their morals.

G.M.Trevelyan describes the condition of the underworld of London as follows " The lower strata of the population of the capital, the dockers and unskilled casual labour of a great mart and port, lived under the most filthy conditions of overcrowding, without sanitation, police or doctors, and far beyond the range of philanthropy, education and religion".[1] He goes on to say "Even honest workmen in the ranks of unskilled labour in London were totally without education." [2]

The standard of living of the poorer classes was not only little above that of the brute creation, but in addition they lived continually in a world of fear. J.H.Whiteley records "The eighteenth century saw official belief in witchcraft etc. die, for in 1736 laws against withbcraft were repealed", [3] but with such a background of colossal ignorance, we may well deduct that popular belief would lag far behind the official enactment.

Very briefly, these were the salient features of the times through which John Byrom lived. This was the sombre setting of a life, which along with some others, shines like a star in a dark sky.

1. English Social History p.331 2. Ibid p.331 3. Wesley's England p.74

Chapter II.

BYROM - THE MAN.

LIFE.

The claim that John Byrom was one of the lesser lumin: :aries of his time, but nevertheless a luminary, can readily be substantiated; yet strangely enough he is one of the for: :gotten men of his period. Invariably the final syllable of his name must be sounded very deliberately lest it should be mistaken for his more illustrious fellow poet. The nom-de-plume adopted by Byrom, "John Shadow", was prophetic of his own fate; for although he mingled with the great figures of his time, Butler, Warburton, Bentley, Wesley, and Law, coming within the orbit of his influence, yet he was soon forgotten. Like a shadow he passed over the page of history, and was gone. Perhaps he was too near such men as Wesley and Law in point of time and thought, and consequently was overshadowed by them; but whatever may be the reason assigned for this neglect, it is not for any lack of clear and definite information regard: :ing his life and works.

John Byrom was born on 29th February 1691 at Kersall Cell, Broughton, near Manchester. His ancestors can be traced back to the time of Edward II when "Henry de Buyroum takes his rank as an attestor amongst the chief feudal proprietors in his own immediate neighbourhood." [1] None of the Byrom family, however, ever held high position in the state, nor were they ever elected members of Parliament, despite their lengthy pedigree. The poet and stenographer was the second son, and seventh of nine children. His paternal grandfather, Edward, inherited latitud: :inarian views, though it is known that he was a man of moderation.

1. Notes p.3 The Byrom Pedigrees. Remains Vol. 2. Part 2.

The vein of sectarian and ecclesiastical zeal had almost run out in the family e'er Edward Byrom, son of the former Edward Byrom, had reached maturity. Like most upper-middle-class men of his time, he was more concerned with the making of money and buying up of estates, than with religious controversy. On 29th July 1703 he became the owner of lands in Salford, which property eventually came into the possession of John Byrom in 1740, owing to the death of his elder brother, Edward. On the maternal side there were very strong Royalist leanings, for his maternal grandfather, Captain John Allen was a retainer of the 'martyr'Earl of Derby, a zealous Royalist. It is therefore from this branch of his family that John Byrom appears to derive his very definite Jacobite preferences. Baby John must have been a very weakly child at his birth and not expected to live, for he was baptized the same day. To falsify expectations he grew to be well over six feet tall and although gentle of man:ner, well able to take care of himself. At the age of six:teen he was enrolled as a pupil in the Merchant Taylors' School and from there he proceeded to Trinity College, Cambridge, on 6th July 1708. His time at the university was put to very good account, not only in acquiring a store of miscellaneous knowledge, but in fixing habits of study and enquiry which he carried with him throughout his life. He graduated B.A. in 1712 and became a Fellow of his college in 1714, proceeding to M.A. in the year 1715. During this college period he was not entirely absorbed in academic pursuits, for the poetic muse was beginning to stir within him. His pastoral "Colin and Phoebe" appeared in No. 605 of the Spectator on 6th October 1714 and he also contributed papers on Dreams, to the same periodical.

The life and movements of Byrom for the next two or three years are shrouded in mystery, but were momentous in giving a particular point of view and emphasis to his religious thought. In the year 1716 he travelled to Montpelier, in the South of France, ostensibly to study medicine. Whether the zeal for medical study was the real reason for this journey is nevertheless open to very grave doubt. It is more than likely that the veil of secrecy was thrown over his movements because of his very definite bias towards the Stuart cause. Edward Byrom, his brother writes from Manchester on 17th August 1717 "Not one person but ourselves knows where you are, but we think now to let our friends know that you are studying physic at Montpelier." [1] Further light is thrown on Byrom's movements at this period by a "Letter to the Master-Tool" [2] written in 1747 by Josiah Owen, a Unitarian minister in Rochdale. Owen attacked Byrom for his love of scribbling verses, he then proceeded to take him to task for - so he thought - his greed in securing an Act of Parliament, for his devotion to Mysticism and Behmen, and above all, for his personal dealings in former days with the Pretender at Avignon. How far this latter charge was based upon fact will perhaps never be known, but if it were true, one would have thought that Byrom would have taken more pains to conceal his political sympathies in later times. Personal dealings with an aspirant to the throne, might have cost him dearly. That Byrom found the study of medicine very interesting may be judged from one of his letters in which he says, "I cannot help "being sorry that it has not always been my study." [3] But although medicine was his special study at this time, the moulding influence of his life was that of Antoinette Bourignon,

1. Remains Vol. 1 p.35.
2. Poems Vol. 1 p.360.
3. Remains Vol. 1 p.36.

Master tool (of the tories and non-jurors of Manchester).

and in a somewhat less degree, Malebranche and Fenelon. He spoke of Malebranche as being "The greatest divine that e'er lived upon earth." [1] The question of the influence of the Mystics on his religious thought will arise at a later and more appropriate point of the discussion. From the time of his Continental sojourn he was known to the world as Dr. Byrom, but medicine was never the means of his livelihood. On 14th February 1721 he married his cousin, Elizabeth Byrom, daughter of Joseph Byrom of Byrom Hall. Evidently the latter was re: :luctant to give his consent to the marriage, no doubt because of the bridegroom's rather precarious financial position, for the bride's sister Ann comments naively "On Tuesday last Elizabeth was married to Dr. Byrom, with the consent of father and mother." [2] Although the child of a well-to-do father, his wife could not be styled according to the fashion of the time - "a lady of handsome fortune", for immediately after his marriage John Byrom had recourse to the teaching of shorthand as a means of supporting himself and his wife. His letters to his wife reveal a constant affection towards her, and his enforced absence from home is often referred to as irk: :some to him. A charming letter to Mrs Byrom written twenty-eight years after their marriage is a gem of deep yet restrained affectionate language. Their son Edward was about to marry Miss Eleanor Halsted, and with reference to the marriage Byrom writes to his wife "I wish that whenever he marries he may meet with one that he may have just reason to love, honour, and cher: :ish as his father has his Valentine, whom he begs to take all possible (care) of a life and health so dear to him, who is, with hearty prayers to God for her and hers - hers and theirs - J. Byrom."[3] With such a bond of affection uniting them it is

1. Dictionary of National Biography. 2. Remains Vol. 1 p.43.
3. Remains Vol. 2 p.488.

not surprising to find a poem "To his Wife" in his collection of verses. It is refreshing to read lines like the following from a man of middle life:

"Amidst a world of gaudy scenes
Around me glittering I move;
I wander, heedless what it means,
Bent on the thoughts of her I love." [1]

Characteristically he pursued the study of shorthand with tremendous enthusiasm, and with such effect that shorthand became for him not only a means of livelihood but an absorb:ing passion. Taking up the profession of stenographer nec:essitated his living in London for the greater part of his time, for the capital provided the greatest opportunity for gathering pupils. He became acquainted with many of the leading political and ecclesiastical figures of the time, who desired to acquire the art of rapid writing. London also served as a convenient base from which to canvass Cambridge and Oxford for shorthand subscribers. Of the latter, Charles ..esley was one of Byrom's most successful as well as most distinguished pupils: writing to him in 1738 he says "You are so complete a master that I shame at my own writing when I see the neatness of yours." [2] One suspects that a real passion for teaching shorthand and perhaps the opportunity for meeting interesting and like-minded people, kept him in London long after it was really necessary for him to remain there. Nine years after he had succeeded to the family estates, he paid lengthy visits to London. There are two factors which illus:trate Byrom's great interest in and mastery of shorthand, one is the formation of a society for the furtherance of the art and the amazing historical survey which he gave at the first meeting, where he was installed "Grand-Master" of the society.

1. Poems Vol.2 p.98. 2. Remains Vol.2 p.196.

He pointed out that the Romans had their notae, the Greeks semeia, the Hebrews roshi tibazeth, and the Egyptians their shorthand; Cicero's orations had been reported and Augustus "taught his nephews not natare but notare." 1 Only an enthusiast would have spent the time in such a line of research. The other factor was the national testimony to Byrom's merits and to his system of shorthand in the Act of Parliament of 24th June 1742 "Securing to John Byrom, Master of Arts, the sole right of publishing, for a certain term of years, the Art and Method of Shorthand, invent: :ed by him." It was a great tribute to one who had given a quarter of a century to this particular line of study. Not until 1767 was his "Universal shorthand" published, four years after his death.

It must not be assumed that medicine and shorthand occupied all his thought and attention, for the picture presented by his let: :ters and private journal is that of a man interested in almost every branch of study and also in his fellow creatures. It is the record of an extraordinary man moving quietly among his fellows, having influence with and over them, and disclosing a mind natively vigorous and stored with a wealth of assorted knowledge. The genuineness of his culture was recognised when on 19th March 1724 he was admitted Fellow of the Royal Society by Sir Hans Sloane where he read papers on the art of shorthand. To the end of his days he retained his interest in all cultural affairs, but, as is becoming in age, his interest in religion, always very real, became noticeably deeper. His life, for the most part, was placid, and while he delighted in the companionship which London afforded him, he loved his home in Manchester much more. It was here that he spent the last

1. Remains Vol.1 p.216.

fourteen years of his life, still wielding a vigorous pen, and keeping in touch with the contemporary religious leaders. He died on Monday 26th September 1763 after a lingering ill: :ness which he bore with his customary patience. All his life Byrom's political sympathies were with the Stuarts, he never disguised those beliefs, but he was astute enough, never to fall foul of the law. Yet after his death his relatives were fined £5 because he had not been buried in a woollen shroud as the law required. It is clear that John Byrom's life was lacking in active incident for he was of a contem: :plative turn of mind, therefore it is in the consideration of his character and characteristics that we shall find a more fruitful field of study.

CHARACTER.

John Bailey says of Dr. Johnson "The singular position of Johnson as, in a way, the most national of our men of letters was due not so much to anything he wrote, or even to anything written about him, as to the quality of his own mind and character, to a sort of central sanity that there was about him." [1] In some degree this is also true of John Byrom, the man himself was greater than his works or achievements. Not that his character was without defect or blemish, but in his day, he must have moved in the circle of his friends as an invigorating fragrance, providing the right kind of atmosphere in which religious and moral questions could most profitably be discussed. The source of this delightful influence can be discovered in his very real attempt to keep the two great commandments "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy

1. Dr. Johnson and his circle p.109.

"heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" [1] and, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself".[2] Anyone making the most casual acquaintance with Byrom's life would be im: :pressed by his deep piety and warm human sympathy. An announcement of his death in the Chester newspapers dated October 4th reads as follows "He was generally admired for his entertaining productions and uncommon flow of genius; nor was he less esteemed on account of his humanity, extensive bene: volence, and universal charity. A due exertion of these, together with truly religious sentiment, enabled him to bear a lingering illness with exemplary patience, and a thorough Christian resignation".[3] To take the quality of his warm human sympathy first; this found expression in several differ: :ent ways. The Byrom Coat of Arms bore the heraldic device of three hedgehogs, and in his interesting little poem entitl: :ed "Coat of Arms" Byrom discusses the implications of such a choice; he describes the hedgehog as "a foe to none; but everybody's friend." [4] No line could more fittingly describe John Byrom himself. He was a scholar without being a recluse, by nature he was reflective rather than active, but he delight: :ed in the companionship and conversation of his fellows. With consummate ease he talked either with the aristocracy of the realm on the one hand or with the poorest artisan on the other; he was as much at home in writing to a child as he was in conducting a controversial correspondence with a phil: :osopher. He felt a kinship with men as men, and differences

1. Matt. 23 v.37; 2. Matt. 23 v.39; 3. Remains Vol.2. p.651.
4. Poems Vol. 1 p.28.

of rank, wealth, gifts, or age were no barrier to his interest in them. It is natural however that he should find his chief delight in the companionship of the cultured and enlightened. Reference has already been made to the illustrious men whom he could count as friends; Dr. Elijah Hoole further amplifies the point "Byrom could reckon among his friends some of the fore: :most men of the day. He loved and reverenced Sir Isaac Newton, received letters from Dr. Cheyne the eminent physician, was challenged by Bishop Warburton to discuss "Enthusiasm". Re: :ceived letters in Latin from Count Zinzendorf, and in German from Jacobi. Knew Oglethorpe and Spangenburg. Visited Lady Huntingdon. Paid his respects to the Pretender in Manchester." [1] The following passage in a letter dated June 22nd 1738 to his wife is however eloquent in its testimony of Byrom's true re: :gard for worth, wherever he found an honest heart "I confess myself full as well pleased with the sentiments of the poor brazier whom I think I mentioned, and with whom I have been to: :day and had much talk with him; he talks more like a bishop." [2] Even when there was nothing to commend a person except his need, Byrom's sympathy went out to him, the poor and unprivileged had a claim upon his affections. Not that he was in any sense a social reformer, his passions did not rise in hot protest against social injustice. He was as blind to the need for higher wages and for Parliamentary Reform as any of his con: :temporaries, in this he was only a child of his time. Not always, but very frequently, the urge to lead a crusade against oppression has its roots in the hard school of personal experience.

1. Wesleyan Methodist Magazine 1863. p.1011;
2. Remains Vol. 2. p.208.

But John Byrom had never known what it was to go hungry at dinner-time nor to be at the mercy of unscrupulous creditors. He lived in a different world from the masses. In a word, his sympathy was with cases rather than with causes. Nor did worldly wisdom which often accompanies advancing years, dam up the stream of his youthful, impulsive, generosity; it flowed steadily on into his later life. We find him recording in his Journal on 20th January 1725 "A poor woman fell into fits at the Cross, I took her up, stood by her, gave her six: :pence", [1] and again, with a Good Samaritan touch, in July 1736 to a Mrs. Sharples "I forgot to leave the five shillings which I had for Mr Tickel, in your hands. I beg the favour of you to order any of your servants to make enquiry about him; there was a letter sent to him from London on Saturday last. If he be yet in Lichfield, and has occasion for any little matter to help him on to Manchester, if you please to assist him as far as five shillings more may be necessary, the whole shall thankfully be repaid to your order by your h. servt. - J.B." [2] Throughout his Journal and Letters there are numer: :ous references to these acts of mercy. They are not the gifts of a person idly flinging a copper to a beggar, then passing on without further thought or concern, but the over: :flow of a heart which was ~~wondrous~~ extraordinarily kind. Nothing can reveal the virtue of consummate pity more fully than Byrom's exertions on behalf of Dr. Deacon's two sons who fell into the hands of the government troops after the surrender of Carlisle on Dec: :ember 24th 1745. With a tact and delicacy born only of genuine concern, he pleaded with government officials for the

1. Remains Vol.1 p.81; 2. Remains Vol.2 p.56.

lives of these two prisoners. It was a difficult matter, for Byrom's political sympathies were well known to his titled Whig friends, Sir Wm. Stanhope, the Duke of Richmond, Sir John Cope, and others. His overtures were only very partially successful, for the elder brother was executed and the younger was banished to the plantations for life. Nevertheless [illegible] f his efforts are not to be measured by their moderate success, they represented the selfless exertions of a brave and loyal heart, revealed most clearly in his own words in a letter to his wife "One can only try, as occasion offers, what mercy can be got from trying." [1] The following extract from his Journal, dated May 2nd 1735 gives a vivid picture of the putting of himself into his gifts. "There was a poor woman sat upon a stone in Chancery Lane with a child, I gave her 1½d, and be: :ing very thankful 6d, at which she seemed mightily affected ... I gave him (the Watchman) about 4d in farthings to see her safe home in Drury Lane, and I followed them, and he brought her part of the way and then gave her a piece of candle, and she went on and through a dark lane with her candle out, at the other end of which I saw her again having gone round about, and gave her 1/- there, and the Watchman 1d to see her home ... I wish I had gone with her and the Watchman to the place where she lived, but I came home and had a glass of water and went to bed." [2]

This noble sentiment finds fitting expression in some lines he penned sometime after the year 1754, the year when the found: :ation stone of the Manchester Infirmary was laid. For neither time nor worldly wisdom, nor exploitation had any

1. Remains Vol.2. p.448; 2. Remains Vol.1 p.602.

hardening effect upon his generous spirit. He calls his poem "Verses designed for an Infirmary". [1] It is pointed out that the surest reward of wealth is to give it away in procuring health for others, and in doing this the donor may be quite sure that his money is being "properly laid out". The fifth verse deserves selection for the warmth of its expression.

> "O Godlike Work ! Who forwards it is sure
> That ev'ry step advances his own cure;
> Without benevolence the view to self
> Makes worldly riches an unrighteous pelf;
> While, blest thro' life, the giver for his love
> Dies, to receive its huge reward above."

Examination will prove to us that this stream of deep kind: :liness had its source in a profound personal piety. Throughout his life Byrom was always questing for a deeper spiritual experience and a surer knowledge of God. While he sought this in the services of the Church to which he be: :longed, and remained a convinced High-Churchman to the end of his days, yet he was willing to learn from any and every religious body. Francis Okely, a learned and enthusiastic divine, writing to him in April 1757 says "You are a friend of God's people in every denomination and I believe you rejoice heartily in their welfare and prosperity", [2] There is not the least doubt that he did. Leaders of religious thought were his particular friends but he especially venerated those of mystical leanings. Nor did he neglect his own private devotions, we find him distressed one morning because he "Before seven, waked and had had a very good night but dull in prayer". [3] His soul was nourished on the Bible and de: :votional classics, especially "The Imitation of Christ" by

1. Poems Vol.2. p.341; 2. Remains Vol.2. p.645;
3. Remains Vol.1. p.587.

Thomas à Kempis. Not that he desired such reading to be dope to his conscience, for he believed that too much reading and too little action was spiritual dissipation. Better a few religious books tested out in living than a library, the read: :ing of which only satisfied the mind without affecting the life. It was, however, the very vivid consciousness of God's goodness to him which was the fount of his kindliness and humility: freely he had received and freely he would give. He was a sinner in need of Divine forgiveness and help, there: :fore he would be tolerant of the faults and failings of others. The redemption of his soul by Christ was for Byrom a constant theme of thanksgiving, which frequently finds expression in his Letters and Journal.

It is interesting to note that this quest for a sincere and deep spiritual experience produced a tension or conflict in John Byrom's character. He was a man in love with living, he rejoiced in friendships, and even seems to relish noting down in his journal the details of the various courses of a dinner. He sums up his attitude to life in the following words "I thought I would put down every day some thought or other; what occurred to me this day was, that it was the best thing one could do to be always cheerful, and not to lose any happiness which might result from an easy, cheerful temper, but to have a good heart at all times, and not suffer any sullenness to usurp upon our minds." He continues "A cheerful disposition and frame of mind being the best way of showing our thankfulness to God, and the most valuable habit and temper we can nourish in ourselves, it being a very ir: :regular and unwise thing for a man to afflict himself need:

:lessly and in a manner that can be of no use to himself or his friends". [1]

He was not wanting in courage or without the ability to sacri: :fice for conscience's sake: for example, in 1716 he resigned his fellowship at Cambridge University and accordingly forfeit: :ed any clerical or collegiate ambitions he might have had, be: :cause he differed in his religious outlook from the majority of the clergy; yet John Byrom was not born to be a martyr, an extremist, or a leader of a great crusade. He was a man without strong prejudices and the very antithesis of a fanatic, he was too cautious in temperament and too balanced in judge: :ment to be that, and perhaps suffered from the defect of his virtue, namely, of being able to see so many sides to a quest: :ion that it was difficult for him to take strongly any one side. Yet here is a man who continually felt the pull to: :wards asceticism. It is apparent in the small details of his life, for instance he writes on 4th May 1735 "The reflect: :ion upon my own vain idle words does not please me, for be: :ing sensible that tavern talk is wrong, yet I go to it; it was twelve o'clock when we came away, and so the evening was lost". [2] It can be discerned in the change of his attitude towards the stage. True enough, drama generally had little to commend it in the early part of the century, for the pro: :ductions of Wycherley, Vanbrugh, and Congreve, were vulgar in the extreme. The stage touched the lowest depths and reflects the utter depravity of the times, but there was a noticeable moral improvement in the plays of Steele, Cibber, and Aaron Hill. Byrom's attitude at the age of 38 as far as

1. Journal 29th Feb. 1728. Remains Vol.1. p.296;

2. Remains Vol.1. p.604.

can be judged was not hostile to the stage, for he speaks of going to see "The Beggar's Opera". Besides going to the theatre, at the same time he wrote an epilogue for a musical play entit: :led "Hurlothrumbo". The play was written by Samuel Johnson of Chester who styled himself "Dramatist and dancing-master". It was produced in London on 29th March 1729 at the New Theatre, Haymarket. The epilogue which Byrom appended after the first performance was a burlesque, and obviously he had a very poor opinion of the play and the dramatist. Yet he scarcely would have had anything to do with it at all, if he had had moral scruples about the stage. There is no doubt that at this time he was glad to contribute to the success of "Hurlothrumbo", though he thought "all stage entertainments stuff and nonsense". [1] One epigram from the epilogue survived long after the play it: :self was relegated to a well deserved oblivion:

"Handel himself shall yield to Hurlothrumbo,
And Bononcini too shall cry 'Succumbo'." ..

But two years later he writes "I was against plays", [2] and again in 1735 "I have made a sort of resolution not to go to the opera or playhouses." [3] This attitude was maintained right on to the end of his days. In the year 1760 he register: :ed a strong objection to Mr Purnell, the High-master of the Manchester Grammar School, for preparing and encouraging the boys to perform a play in the Manchester Theatre. That such a fair-minded man could be so prejudiced, strikes us as being odd. The prejudice is apparent in the lines

"Should a good Angel and a bad between
Th' Infirmary and Theatre be seen, ..
One going to be present at the play;
The other where the sick and wounded lay:
Quere, were your conjecture to be had,
Which would the good one go to, which the bad ?" [4]

1. Remains Vol. 1 p.349; [2] Ibid. p.453; [3]. Ibid. p.587;
4. 'A Query' - Poems Vol.1.p.570.

Or again, in a stanza from "The Art of Acting"

> "Actors and Actresses, I say again,
> Are not the pupils worthy of his pen.
> That muse, which histrionic wits applaud,
> The wise will think no better than a bawd". [1]

The reasons, in which the prejudice had its roots, were first of all, the disdain of a man of letters for any diversion which held the favour of the public, as pantomime and opera undoubt:edly did. It was not until Richardson popularised the novel, that an effective answer from the literary side, was given to the stage. ~~Then~~ there was also the growing alignment of Byrom's views with those of William Law, who regarded the stage as an engine of moral corruption. This uncompromising attitude, while not completely shared by Byrom, had a tremendous effect upon his views. This ascetic tendency is also evident in his admiration for the early Methodists in their self-denial and zeal for God, whatever other reservations he had in his judgement of them, and also in his agreement with the Wesleys, and William Law "in their desire to live a devout and holy life". [2] This mild strain of asceticism was nevertheless tempered with a charming sense of humour which peeps out rather shyly in his verse and journal. He seemed to be rather relieved that even William Law his hero, could appreci:ate a joke. He writes on 4th March 1729 "Mr Law said he must have a copy of them (The Pond) and desired that I would not put the whole book (The Serious Call) into verse for then it would not sell in prose - so the good man can joke." [3] While journeying from Liverpool, John Wesley improved the time by reading Byrom's poems, and writes "He has all the wit and

1. Poems Vol. 1. p.262; 2. 1863 Wesleyan Methodist Magazine p.790; 3. Remains Vol. 1. p.337.

humour of Dr. Swift, together with much more learning". [1.] A much more modern critic in "The Century of Divine Songs" describes him as "A witty poet and a fluent paraphraser". [2.] Add to the foregoing qualities those of modesty and gentle: :ness and we have an unvarnished picture of this attractive person. What could be more charmingly modest than this; writing of Mr Stonehouse, a man who in no respect was of Byrom's calibre "I thought it was more fitting for him, an innocent, loving tempered person to talk of such (religious) matters, than me". [3.] Not that this would be an adequate account of Byrom, the man; for several characteristics merge into the moral qualities already described, he had gifts as well as graces.

CHARACTERISTICS.

It cannot be said that Byrom possessed any particular character: :istic to such superlative degree that all others were rele: :gated to insignificance beside it. Nor was he sufficiently talented to be accounted a genius in any one sphere. He was a poet but others were greater, he was a man of wide learning but giants like Newton in Mathematics and Butler in Philosophy were superior to him, in conversation and controversy he was brilliant but he was overshadowed by Johnson, Like Benaiah "He was more honourable than the thirty, but he attained not to the first three". [4.] The measure of the giants must not be used in arriving at a just estimate of Byrom's characteristics, but compared with the great majority of his contemporaries,

1. Wesley's Works Vol.3 p.475. Journal 12th July 1773;
2. Warton Lecture on English Poetry, 1943 - George Sampson;
3. Remains Vol.2.p.237;
4. 2 Samuel - 23 v.: 3.

he was truly remarkable. It can be said with some show of reason that Byrom was too deeply interested in too many aspects of life to be able to devote himself completely to any one of them. In the range and variety of his learning he had few equals: Hoole writes of him "There seems hardly to have been any language of which the literature was any value, which he did not master. Nor was there any scientific or literary quest: :ion, agitated by scholars in his day, into which he did not heartily enter." 1 The wonder is that he achieved such a re: :markable mastery of so many subjects. His interests, with one exception, were of a desultory nature, but the same in: :dustry was manifested in everything he took up. Amid the distractions of teaching shorthand, entering heartily into con: :versations on light and weighty subjects, and when all in: :tention of entering Holy Orders had been dismissed from his mind, he writes in his Journal on Tuesday 10th February 1730 "Now for Hebrew a little by my fireside, went to bed between two and three". 2. This is zeal of no common order. At a much earlier date, when twenty-one years of age he had given evidence of this zeal for languages, for Mrs Brearcliffe on October 4th 1712 speaks of his going "every night and morning down to the water side and bawling out one of Tully's orations in Latin, so loud they can hear him a mile off, so that all the neighbourhood think he is mad." 3. Latin, Greek, Spanish and Italian were a constant source of delight to him. Nothing must stand in the way of his assimilation of knowledge, and from time to time he reproached himself for lying in bed too long; his counsel to his son Tedy in this hard drinking age

1. Wesleyan Methodist Magazine 1863, p.733.
2. Remains Vol. 1. p.425. 3. Ibid. p.20.

was worthy of a temperance reformer "Observe, Tedy, how simple and foolish men make themselves when they drink strong drink, and say to thyself 'I will not be like these men, nor put anything into my body that will take away understanding from my mind'". [1]

Providence had also been kind to Byrom in that he not only had a crystal clear mind but also a marvellous memory. This might be deduced from the ease with which he mastered foreign languages, but it is also demonstrated in his ability to recollect and narrate a conversation bristling with intri:cate and abstruse points. His Journal in many of its entries is a testimony to this enviable ability.

That a man of more than ordinary intellectual stature was among them, was not entirely lost upon his fellows. His advice was sought upon literary subjects and his opinion respected on all religious and moral questions, from Virgil's Eclogues to Deism. The Bishop of Sodor and Man in a charm:ing letter which must have given great satisfaction to Byrom, even asks him to consider compiling a spelling book for young beginners to make the art of reading more easy and complete. "Such a book" writes the worthy divine "would demand a degree of skill and abilities which few are possess:ed of but those who (like Mr Byrom) are thorough masters of language in general and of the English language in particular". [2]

As might be expected of a man so much in love with learning, Byrom was also in love with books. One of his hobbies was the collecting of them, and rarely do we read an extract

1. Remains Vol.2 p.35. 2. Feb. 4th 1743 Remains Vol.2 p.334.

from his Journal without coming upon some reference to the buying of books. He speaks for more than himself in making the following confession "buying of books that smite my fancy (it) is a sort of cacoethes I doubt". [1] The buying of books ~~latter~~ was undoubtedly one of his hobbies, but no account of John Byrom's characteristics would be complete without mention of his other great hobby and accomplishment, namely the study and mastery of shorthand.

The interest shown in the eighteenth century in this form of writing has only been rivalled by its popularity in modern times, although the reasons for the widespread interest in the two centuries are quite different. Shorthand today is an indispensable aid to modern business and a necessary qualification for any person embarking upon a commercial career. Two hundred years ago the inducements to acquire the art were, generally speaking, of another order. Because of the bitter attacks made upon him by writers and pamphleteers, Walpole introduced the 'Licensing Act' in 1737 with the object of curbing such attacks. Its only result, however, was to cause writers to practise various methods of evasion and detection, to hide behind anonymity and to traffic in language capable of more than one interpretation. Others again preferred to write in shorthand characters of which the great majority of people were ignorant. The fight for liberty of expression had been initiated by John Milton in his "Areopagitica", but not yet had it been completely won, writers walked warily lest the Licensing Act should be invoked against them. Then of course in those far off days

1. Remains Vol. 1. p.564.

there was no Copyright Law or Performing Rights Society, and shorthand was one method of preventing plagiarism. It is interesting to note that Charles Wesley insisted that his brother John should learn shorthand as a protection against any who might attempt to read or tamper with their correspond: :once. With these factors in mind, it is easy to realise why shorthand writing was so popular in the early eighteenth century. There were many inventors of shorthand systems and characters, Byrom's chief protagonist being a certain James Weston, but, as previously noted, an Act of Parliament in 1742 granted Byrom the sole right of publishing his own method of shorthand. This method, though nowhere practised to-day, was the basis for more modern methods which have greater facility of execution. His daily Journal was naturally enough "shrouded in the mystery of his own short: :hand". [1] This presented an insuperable barrier to those interested in this charming man's works, but happily it was overcome and the characters deciphered in 1854. Not only do we owe Byrom's Journal to his shorthand, but still more important, much of John Wesley's work was written in the same characters. The first appearance of Byrom's Short: :hand in Wesley's Journal occurs on June 27th 1736, but in addition to the Journal a portion of the third volume of the Georgian Diary and all the later diaries were also written in shorthand. Without this craft it is very doubtful indeed whether such detailed, full, and continuous records would have been kept at all, and the world would have been immeasurably poorer.

1. Remains P.viii.

Mention must also be made of Byrom's power as a controversialist and conversationalist. It is recorded that on one occasion Coleridge said to his friend Charles Lamb "Did you ever hear me preach, Charles ?", which question elicited the prompt reply "Never heard you do anything else". [1] There have been great talkers just like that, Luther was one, who talked with passionate conviction, and always with the aim of converting the hearer. On the other hand there have been great talkers like Dr. Johnson, whose delight was chiefly in the art of con: ;versation itself, the subject of the conversation being of secondary importance. John Byrom too delighted to converse with his fellows, but he took his stand midway between these two extremes. His conversations are reproduced only by him: ;self and a mere sentence which mentions a conversation with some notable figure often makes us wish that it had been fully recorded by some Boswell. Still, there is sufficient material to indicate that while Byrom had time and interest to talk in a leisurely way, his talk was directed chiefly to religious and ethical subjects. Entries taken at random from his Journal, such as "Wilsford talked much against a future state, and I much for it", [2] "Phil. Nicholls and I supped and talk: ;ed together till 11 o'clock. We talked about Malebranche etc. after our old way", [3] "Conversation turned at last upon the subordination that was necessary to be amongst people, and I contended for an equality and for the poor people", [4] are typical. It must not be assumed that because of this sincere religious and ethical note in Byrom's conversation that he used the coffee room as a pulpit, for he was apparently

1. Dr. Johnson & his Circle. Bailey - p.159.
2. Remains Vol. 1 p.180; 3. Ibid. p.207; 4. Ibid. p.490.

more concerned with a philosophic approach to truth than he was in converting others to his way of thinking. True to the temper of his age, he delighted to talk about the various aspects of religious truth, was even affected in his own life by his beliefs, but viewed the religious battle from afar. Yet while there was no religious volcano within his soul, ready to erupt and overflow at any point in a general con:versation, light, if no heat, was thrown upon many a subject as Byrom talked. Conversation drew from him the convictions and opinions reached by much quiet pondering. But of course it was not in general conversation so much as in argument and controversy that he excelled, and which he loved dearly. Entries in his Journal, first of all on May 2nd 1737 which reads "I have always a great apprehension of having talked too much whenever I mention such things (religion and morals) and yet I have not the grace to keep silent", [1] and again on May 18th of the same year "I should restrain my talking way" [2] throw light on this pleasant characteristic. In this age of reason, when controversy and speculation were the order of the day, Byrom was impatient with the loose thinking of so many would-be leaders of thought, and many a shrewd blow he gave them. One is tempted to quote the complete short poem "On Specious and Superficial Writers", it is so pungent in every line, but the following extracts from it are sufficient to convey Byrom's sense of annoyance -

"How rare the case, tho' common the pretence,
To write on subjects from a real sense ! (a)
'Tis many a celebrated Author's fate
To print effusions just as parrots prate.

1. Remains Vol. 2. p.99. 2. Remains Vol.2 p.163.

(a) A sense of their reality.

"While froth and bubble glaze the flowing mud,
And the man thinks all clear and understood.
A shining surface and a transient view,
Makes the slight-witted reader think so too.
It entertains him, and the book is bought,
Read and admir'd without expense of thought". [1]

It should be remembered that this was the age of the pamphleteer, of new ideas, and of controversy. The action of the preceding century had given place to reflection and speculation, when every man having an idea to ventilate, a person or principle to attack, or a philosophy to expound, rushed into print. It was inevitable that there should be some chaff among the grain, but Byrom impatiently blew it away and desired that others should do the same. His power in argument and clarity of thought may be deduced from the following expanded syllogism. In reply to Pits and Street, two Deists of the day, who argued that reason alone could find out whether God was God, Byrom pointed out that reason was the gift of this God, and therefore one could hardly find Him out to be not God by it, since He could not be supposed to give it us for that purpose. [2]

It is further illustrated ~~Or again,~~ when he pitted his dialectical skill against a more formidable opponent in the person of Bishop Butler. This ~~latter~~ encounter was a battle between giants with Butler emerging with the greater credit, but to quote from the editor's notes "Butler evidently felt that he had to do with an original thinker, who, though not always right, was seldom far wrong". [3] So much of the controversy of the 18th Century was marred by a spirit of rancour, ~~as indeed it is of every century~~. It is so much easier to call a man a knave than ~~to elucidate the facts concerning him~~ to establish the fact so clearly concerning him that no other judgement.

1. Poems Vol. 1 p.222. 2. Journal 3rd Jan. 1731.
3. Remains Vol. 2 p.99. Remains Vol.1 p. 445.

is possible. All too many controversialists adopted the former of these methods. Even when Byrom's passions were roused in the most acrid of contests, and when he was young and therefore most likely to be impetuous, he showed remarkable restraint, Bentley, the Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, had been bitterly attacked in pamphlets written by two Fellows of the College, namely, Middleton and Sergeant Miller, Miller's pamphlet had appeared in 1717 and those of Middleton in 1719. Byrom had a great regard for Bentley and a fondness for his daughter Joanna, while he was on very friendly terms with the Master's nephew, Tom, whose name often occurs in the Journal. Accordingly, a vigorous reply was published from an anonymous hand which, to quote Bishop Monk "Exhibits a less rancorous spirit than may be found in their (Middleton's and Miller's) respective publications against Bentley".[1] There was no doubt in the minds of many of Byrom's contemporaries who the anonymous writer was. He was prepared to enter the lists and fight hard, but he would not allow anonymity to be a cloak for unfair or scurrilous writing. Such was the type of Byrom's con: :versation and controversy.

One concluding characteristic must not be omitted from this brief sketch, for if in anything Byrom exhibited enthusiasm, it was in the Jacobite Cause. Saintsbury in "Social England"[2] describes him as a lesser poet "who contributed to the Spectator and lived till well into the reign of George III - a Jacobite, a mystic, a shorthand pundit, a physician, a very interesting person." The order of the epithets is most

1. Life of Bentley - Monk.

2. Vol.5 p.105.

interesting. This enthusiasm for the Stuart Cause got him into trouble early in life, a fact which has been already noted, for immediately following the '15 Rebellion, all Jacobites were viewed with acute suspici n. But the punishment, if it can be called such, of his prolonged stay in the South of France did nothing to diminish his ardour, for he even passed on his own enthusiasm to his eldest daughter Elizabeth. On the occasion of Prince Charles' visit to Manchester in November 1745, we find her writing "St. Andrew's Day. More crosses making till twelve o'clock, then I dressed me up in my white gown.....when he (the Prince) rid out of the court he was received with as much joy and shouting almost as if he had been king without any dispute, indeed I think scarce anybody that saw him could dispute it". [1] This feminine ardour must have gladdened her father's heart, and three years later, John Byrom was interested enough to read an account of Prince Charles' arrest in Paris, to a company at Rothmell's coffee house. "Beppy's" Father, too, was escorted - no doubt quite willingly - to meet the Prince when the Highland army took up their quarters in Manchester. It is believed that the majority of the inhabitants fled before the advancing host, but obviously, Byrom had nothing to fear from the Stuarts. Indeed, some of his writings attributed to this period are of a very outspoken and unmistakable character. "A dialogue between Sir John Jobson and Harry Homespun," Harry speaking in the Lancashire dialect, is very forthright and would leave no one in doubt that the author was in perfect agreement with the weaver, Harry.

1. Remains Vol. 2. p.393.

The latter's argument was a plea for the rights of minorities, as applied to the Stuart cause.

"If folks may tak whot Kings they han a moind,
Whot faut wi' all theese Scotchmen con yo foind?" [1]

It was not apparent to Byrom that there are limits to the claims of minorities, or that the attainment of a minority's object should be along constitutional lines. That doctrine is very dubious which asserts that the end justifies the means. How far this devotion to the Stuarts was the result of his usual calm and clear judgement, it is impossible to say; but when it is remembered that he was a Tory, a High-Churchman and a Lancunian, then it can be seen at once that this combination of factors provided him with a very strong bias. But perhaps the most important factor was the allegiance of the Byrom family to the Stuarts as far as can be traced, to the year 1685. In that year, John, Joseph, and Edward Byrom respectively signed an address to the Lord and Lieutenant of Lancashire, offering to furnish "a foot soldier, well armed pike", "a muskateer", and "a foot soldier" [2] to assist in crushing Monmouth's rebellion. This bias was not so strong, however, to interfere with his profession as a teacher of shorthand, or with his friendships, for he counted among his distinguished pupils Horace Walpole , the son of the Whig Prime Minister. Notwithstanding the zeal manifested for Jacobitism in the middle of the 18th Century, it had ceased to be a vital cause for the great majority of its English devotees, and was fast becoming a sentimental dream. No doubt Byrom was not impervious to this gradual change in attitude. He never swerved in his allegiance to the Established Church though the

1. Poems Vol. I p.280.
2. The Historical MSS Commission's 14th Report Part iv.pp.181 & 182. Quoted in Remains Vol. 2. p.650.

Royal Family was prayed for regularly. It may be urged, of course, that in this matter he had his own mental reservations. Be that as it may, he was prepared to express his opinion and express it vigorously, but beyond that, he would not go. So even his own departure from the philosophic approach was tempered by human kindliness and good sense.

Chapter III

WORKS

Apart from a few hymns and some fragments of rhyme very little of John Byrom's literary work is known to the general public of today. No one would claim that he is a poet of the highest order and very few that his Journal can rank alongside similar works by Wesley, Foxe and Evelyn. Yet despite his literary defects, he has scarcely received the attention which his work deserves. This becomes very apparent when it is remembered that Addison, who was no mean judge of meritorious work, was evidently quite impressed by Byrom's first contribution to the "Spectator" when he was a graduate at Cambridge. Addison writes on the 27th August 1714 "By the last post I received the following letter which is built upon a thought that is new and very well carried on, for which reasons I shall give it to the public without alteration, addition or amendment",[1] the thought referred to was a disquisition on the subject of dreams, revealing considerable psychological insight at this early date. This contribution was followed quickly by another on 30th August and then again by one on the 15th September. The first and third of these articles bear the customary nom-de-plume "John Shadow", but it is generally agreed that the second is from the same pen. Dr. A.W. Ward casts grave doubt upon an observation attributed to Samuel Johnson which appeared in an American Edition of the Spectator, printed in 1861, where it is stated "In Dr. Johnson's opinion, the best of the Spectator might still have been better, had Mr. Byrom's contributions to it been more numerous, and not inferior to the few specimens he has given of his abilities." The grounds of Ward's doubt is found in Johnson's scorn of all contributions of the Spectator, not written by Addison himself. But it may well be that the generalisation was much too sweeping to reflect Johnson's detailed estimate. Yet even with Addison's commendation, few will turn to these early prose efforts, nor is it likely that posterity will turn frequently to the pamphlet entitled "A Review of the Proceedings against Dr. Bentley in the University of Cambridge: in answer to a late pretended full and impartial account etc. With some remarks upon Sergeant Miller's account of

1. Lancashire Worthies - Francis Espinasse p.223.

that University" by N.O., M.A. of the same University", published in 1719. Similarly, a very forceful and cogently argued pamphlet, written at a much later date, addressed to the inhabitants of Manchester, and entitled "A serious disswasive from an intended subscription, for continuing the Races upon Kersal Moore",[1] will ever become widely known. His chief claim to consideration lies, of course, in his Journal and Poems. Of the latter, as already noted, Wesley was a most generous critic and the redoubtable Warburton although disagreeing most heartily with Byrom on many matters, is lavish in his praise of him as a poet. What could be finer than this tribute "how much I think the literary world loses by your not applying your talents more to poetry, in which you appear naturally formed to excel".[2] Or again, in writing to Hurd on 2nd January 1752, he asks "Do you know Byrom's character? or have you seen his two Epistles, one a year or two ago, on occasion of Sherlock's book of Prophecies, and the other, just now, on Enthusiasm? He is certainly a man of genius, plunged deep into the rankest fanaticism. His poetical Epistles show him both, which, were it not for some unaccountable negligence in his verse and language, would show us that he has hit upon the right style for familiar didactic epistles in verse".[3]

John Byrom's fame as a poet, of course, began with the appearance of "My Time, O ye Muses" on October 6th, 1714 in the Spectator, but - to quote A.W. Ward "few of his numerous poems were published by his own authority, and still fewer, if any at all, with his name during his life".[4] Very many of his poems can be dated quite accurately by making reference to his Journal entries. "Tunbridgiale", a description of Tunbridge, was one of his early published poems, dating back to the year 1726. This was followed in 1728 by "A Horrid and Barbarous Robbery", printed for J. Roberts of Warwick Lane, and in 1729 by the "Epilogue to Hurlothrumbo". It was in this latter year that Byrom began versifying part of William Law's "Serious Call". The epigram on "Bone and Skin" appeared in the "Gentleman's Magazine" in May 1737, "Armelle Nicolas' account of herself" in 1739, and in the same year the Wesleys, included the two hymns "A hymn of Jesus" and "A Farewell to the World" in their publication "Hymns and Sacred Songs". Little of Byrom's work

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appears to have reached the public between the year 1739 and 1747, and it is interesting and significant that this period co-incides almost exactly with William Law's long silence, namely, between the writing of his "Appeal to all that doubt" and the "Spirit of Prayer". Nevertheless, during these eight years Byrom produced one of his longest poems, "Enthusiasm", based on Law's "Appeal". It was penned in 1743, but not published until nine years afterwards. Verses which had been contributed to the Chester Courant from the winter of 1746 appeared in a volume entitled "Manchester Vindicated", published in 1749 at Chester.

The Byrom-Owen controversy had its origin in a rather long poem entitled "An Epistle to a Friend" published in 1747 in London for a Mr. M. Cooper of Paternoster Row, and "The Chester Printers' Penance" came out in an issue of the Chester Courant in the year 1748. Thereafter John Byrom's pen was very busy, for increasingly he was finding his inspiration in the works of William Law, especially in the "Spirit of Prayer", and the "Spirit of Love". Part of the former was versified and published in 1749 under the title "An Epistle to a Gentleman of the Temple", while sections of Law's book form the basis of thought for the poem "On the Fall of Man", and an exquisite little gem entitled "A Prayer". The "Spirit of Love" provided the inspiration for at least three of Byrom's poems; namely "Universal Good, the object of the Divine Will", "On the meaning of wrath in Scripture", and "The true grounds of eternal and immortal rectitude". But undoubtedly Byrom is known to most people through his immortal hymn "Christians Awake!" This Christmas hymn was written in 1750? and though the date of publication cannot be given with certainty, very probably it first appeared in Adams' Manchester Weekly paper in 1751. It only remains to mention the publication of "The Immortality of the Soul" in 1754, a translation from the Latin of Isaac Hawkins Browne and also "A defence of Rime" which was Byrom's contribution to the literary contest with Roger Comberback. The date of publication of the latter was probably 1755.

1. The Charters of the Collegiate Church with other Ancient Curiosities, 2nd edition 1733.
2. 3rd April 1752 Remains Vol.2 p.534.
3. Letters to Hurd p.97 quoted in Remains Vol.2 p.522.
4. Poems Vol.1, p.xxii (note 3).

The first collection of Miscellaneous Poems was published in Manchester in the year 1773, and Francis Okely collected and printed in 1774 those of Byron's poems which are paraphrases of the works of William Law, under the title "Seasonably alarming and humiliating truths in a Metrical Version of certain selected passages taken from the works of William Law."

In 1810 Alexander Chalmers published another edition of Byron's Works and prefaced them with a short biography. He is lavish in his praise of Byron's gifts and writes in the following glowing terms: "In these (The Astrologer, The Pond, Contentment, most of his Tales and Fables, 23rd Psalm) there appears so much of the genuine spirit of poetry, and so many approaches to excellence, that it would be difficult, even upon the principles of fastidious criticism, and impossible upon those of comparison, to exclude Byron from a collection of English poets." His appraisal mounts to a climax in these words: "He depicts the classical enthusiast, and the virtuoso, with a strength of colouring, not inferior to some of Pope's happiest portraits in his Epistles."[1] This appreciative view was shared by James Nichols who reprinted Byron's poems at Leeds in 1814.

In his preface to the 1814 Edition, Nichols' judgment is as follows: "His invention was fertile, his allusions happy, his imagery just, and in no part of his poetry does there appear a defect, except in the finishing."[2] He also gives some most illuminating reasons for the neglect of the poems. In the first place, the impression of the 1773 Edition was small, and its circulation practically confined to Lancashire and Yorkshire. The poems consequently would come into the hands of very few literary men who, especially in the latter part of the eighteenth century, were congregated in the capital city. Besides, Byron's leanings towards Mysticism were regarded in many quarters as so much heresy, and therefore created a prejudice against his poetry. Nichols also alleges that only a few poems were intended for publication, which reason appears to be somewhat obscure, and carries the suggestion that a great deal of the work is below the high standard claimed for it by Nichols himself. Quite apart from the consideration of any inherent

1. The Works of the English Poets - Additional Lives by Alexander Chalmers. - p.191
2. Poems p.xxiv.

defect in the poetry, may it not be that Byron also suffered neglect from the change which came over the taste of the reading public? The poetry of the day had been based predominantly on the appeal to reason, it was cold, clear and logical, pleasing to the ear, satisfying to the mind, but having little in it to rouse the emotions, ~~but~~ the novel supplanted the poem with its appeal to sentiment and the elemental interest in a story. Then it must be admitted that in a century which was rich in poets, the latter were more than a match for Byron.

Modern critics have been less fulsome in their praise. The most appreciative among them is A.W. Ward, who edited a reprint of Byron's Poems for the Chetham Society in 1894 and 1895. A supplementary volume of Icems representing little more than the last fragments of his poetic productivity was printed by the same Society in the year 1912, where Ward in the preface of this edition says "Taking his verse for all in all, it displays the lasting freshness as well as simplicity of his mind."[1] Even this modest appreciation is considerably modified in the Dictionary of National Biography, where it is maintained that Byron's verse is "scarcely better than clever doggerel."

Or again,

1. p.iv.

in the Cambridge History of English Literature "Byron though scarcely a poet, for he lacked imagination, had an unusual facility for turning everything into rhyme," [1] and yet again "Byron is hardly thought, even by his warm admirers, to be other than a second-rate poet".[2] To quote once more in support of this view, Hobhouse says " an industrious versifier whose productions occasionally rise to the level of true poetry."[3] Comments ranging from such high praise on the one hand to scarcely concealed contempt on the other, call for some examination of the poems, for such diverse judgments must have been reached by the application of different canons of criticism.

Imperfections. It is quite true that with a few exceptions, Twining's estimate of Johnsons's poetry is equally appropriate as an estimate of Byron's, namely, that it was "good sense put into good metre". But it must be kept in mind that the age in which these writers produced their work, was one of robust common sense, perhaps a little pedestrian, but having a sense of reality, and as Johnson says truly "every man's performances, to be rightly estimated, must be compared with the state of the age in which he lived and with his own particular opportunities." In any case, may poems not be written tolerably well for common people who can scarcely appreciate the higher flights of those gifted with this divine art, but who readily remember and appreciate rhymed verse? It is alleged that after William Shakespeare, the poet most frequently quoted is Alexander Pope; not because his poetry is better than that of Browning, Wordsworth or Shelley, nor that his thought is more profound, but because his lines are more easily remembered. It is an interesting speculation to consider whether Byron just required that spark of inspiration which comes from a profound spiritual experience to elevate his work to an altogether higher plain. Rattenbury offers this comment on Charles Wesley "His poems, other than his hymns, give little ground for supposing, that apart from his religious inspiration, he would have ranked high amongst even the 18th century poets."4. This intense feeling, so characteristic of Wesley's hymns, is certainly lacking in

1. Vol..., Ch.XII p.326. 2. Studies of a Biographer p.76 - Leslie Stephen.
3. William Law and the 18th century Quakers p.109.
4. The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns p.32.

Byrom's poetry, except where he too turns hymn-writer. Then it is that we catch a glimpse of what might have been. If only he had thrown his characteristic caution to the winds and had allowed his soul to be overwhelmed the hymn books of the various churches might have been enriched with a more liberal sprinkling of Byrom's hymns. As it is,to quote John Julian "From these poems less than half-a-dozen hymns have come into common use. One of these however, has a reputation which has extended to all English speaking countries."[1] "Christians, Awake!" sent as a Christmas present to his little daughter Dorothy, is a universal favourite. The form in which it appears in present day collections was given to it in Cotterill's selection of Psalms and Hymns", eighth edition, 1819. Another hymn of equal merit is "Come Saviour Jesus from above", a translation from Antoinette Bourignon's poem, ~~in French~~. The latter hymn is often claimed for John Wesley, and it appears as such in the Methodist Hymn Book.[2] Dr.Henry Bett thinks that "the style of the two hymns ('Come Saviour Jesus' and 'A Farewell to the World', is unquestionably more like that of John Wesley than like that of Byrom".[3] Yet as Wesley read the poems in the 1773 Edition, which included the hymn "Come Saviour Jesus", without commenting upon it, it seems reasonable to assume that the original translation was made by Byrom. It may possibly have been edited by Wesley and then included in his own collection of Hymns and Sacred Poems in 1739. Apart from a few hymns, Byrom's poetry lacks the quality of imagination, since it is also deficient in depth of feeling, for in verse the two features are usually present or absent together. It ought to be remembered, however, that this was characteristic of the poetry of the period, it was smooth, trim, and restrained, and in this Byrom was a man of his time. His affinity with some other writers of the 18th Century can be noticed in the almost complete absence in his poems of references to Nature or Natural Beauty. In his charming little pastoral "My Time, O ye Muses", a theme which lent itself to the descriptive art, there is little indication that he even cared for

1. Dictionary of Hymnology - John Julian. 2. No.546.
3. The Hymns of Methodism p.119.

natural beauty, for his references to birds and flowers are slight. One exception to this general rule occurs in "An Epistle to a Gentleman in the Temple". Here, like Isaac Watts, and greater still, like John Milton, he sets his thought against the immensity and beauty of God's creation, and pauses to wonder.

> "If when we cast a thoughtful, thankful eye
> Towards the beauties of the ev'ning sky,
> Calm we admire thro' the ethereal field
> The various scenes that even clouds can yield -
> What huge delight must Natur's Fund afford,
> Where all the rich realities are stor'd
> Which God produces from its vast abyss
> To His own glory and His creature's bliss." [1]

Yet even here it must be remembered that Byrom is paraphrasing William Law.

This lack of appreciation for the beauties of Nature is also noticeable in Johnson, who could blaspheme to the extent of saying "Who can like the Highlands", and in Wesley who has in his hymns "Scarcely any reference to natural beauty" [2]. Nor can it be said that Byrom showed imagination in the handling of new metres, the formal metres and rhymed couplets of the period were quite adequate to express his sincere, yet not very profound, thoughts and feelings. An interesting exception to this generalisation is pointed out by G.Sampson [3], it is found in "The Desponding Soul's Wish" and "The Answer", which makes the last line of each stanza the first of the next, e.g.

> "My Spirit longeth for Thee
> Within my troubled breast;
> Altho' I be unworthy
> Of so Divine a Guest.
>
> Of so Divine a Guest
> Unworthy tho' I be,
> Yet has my heart no Rest,
> Unless it come from Thee." 4

Another exception can be found in "An hymn on Simplicity." Despite the very curious combination of metres employed in this poem Byrom manages to trip through it with ease. Having been so successful with such a measure, reminiscent of Charles Wesley's bold experiments in hymnology, it is amazing that he was content to allow formal or jingling metres to do duty for him. This is a typical verse from the poem:-

1. Poems Vol.2 p.154. 2. Charles Wesley p.186 Wiseman
3. Warton lecture on English poetry 1943 p.25. 4. Poems vol.2 p.83

"Nor within me nor without
Let hypocrisy reside;
But whate'er I go about,
Mere simplicity be guide!
Simplicity guide me in word and in will;
Let me live - let me die - in simplicity still;
Of an epitaph made me let this be the whole:
'Here lies a true child, that was simple of soul!' "[1]

What is it then which gives merit and interest to Byrom's poetry and why are fragments of it still quoted? The answer to these questions will become clearer as we look at his prose works as well as his poetry, for the charm is found in both. Undoubtedly the most striking feature of his writing is its simplicity; for the most part, the simplest words are used and the thought is expressed in the simplest way. Byrom frowned on the French style of poetry, which he labelled "Foppish, affected, queer, and quaint", he preferred to be himself and to imitate nobody. A typical example of this simple style is found in the poem "On Patience":-

"Be on your guard; the Business of a man
Is, to be sure, to do what good he can, -
But first at home: let Patience rule within,
Where Charity, you know, must first begin;
Not money'd Love is fondly understood,
But calm, sedate Propensity to Good". [2]

The same characteristic appears in his literary Remains, a collection of his letters and his Journal, edited by Richard Parkinson and published by the Chetham Society between the years 1854-7. Of this publication Dr.Ward is quite enthusiastic, and goes so far as to say that if it were more widely known, it would be "One of the most popular works of English biographical literature". Hobhouse too re-echoes this sentiment, for he says, "Byrom's Journal appears to share with that of Samuel Pepys the distinction of entire artlessness",[3] which is high praise indeed. Of course, Byrom's Journal, like that of Pepys, was written in cipher and not intended for publication. This quality of artlessness is especially marked in his letters, which reveal in a very personal way the simplicity, almost child-likeness of the man, free from all affectation and pretence.

1. Poems Vol.2 p. 102. 2. Poems Vol.1 p.127.
3. William Law and 18th Century Quakerism p.110.

A small 8 page booklet entitled "John Byrom's Journal, Letters etc:1730-31" was compiled by John E.Bailey and published in 1882. In this volume Bailey is content for the most part to set forth Byrom's work and only adds a few short comments on his life and interests.

He also had more than average wit in this age of wits and witticisms, a capacity for epigram second only to Swift, and a facility for happy remarks and summing up. Take for example these witty and famous lines, summing up neatly the attitude of the majority to the current political situation.

"God Bless the King, I mean our Faith's Defender,
God bless - no harm in blessing the Pretender,
But who Pretender is or who is King,
God bless us all; that's quite another thing". 1

Or this epigram

"Tall men are oft like houses that are tall,
The upper Rooms are furnished worst of all". 2

This same facility is equally apparent when he deals with more serious subjects. What a wealth of shrewdness is packed into these few words which occur in a letter[3] written to Dr.Richardson, "For my part I am so afraid of falling into that unreasonable fondness which people are apt to entertain for their own inventions"; or in a terse sentence in a letter[4] to his son, "What we desire, that we acquire", or again in a pamphlet written on 29th February 1728 "Where men have money given them for their opinions, they often give their opinions for money". Many more epigrammatic turns of speech might be culled from his works, but these perhaps suffice to indicate his remarkable dexterity in this direction. Francis Epinasse also claims for Byrom that he "may be regarded as one of the creators of the vernacular literature of his native country".[5] True enough, he employs the broad, racy and expressive Lancashire dialect in some of his writing which gives to it a homely warmth. Just how effectively dialect can impart warmth may readily be appreciated if one endeavours to paraphrase into English, Burns' simple lines:-

"Wee, modest, crimson-tipped flow'r,
Thou's met me in an evil hour;
For I maun crush amang the stoure
Thy slender stem:
To spare thee now is past my pow'r
Thou bonnie gem."

1. Poems Vol.1 p.574. 2. Poems Vol.2 p.576. 3. 6th February 1738.
4. 21st May 1743. 5. Lancashire Worthies.p.137.

A certain Mr.Milner is quoted by A.W.Ward as saying of the Lancashire dialect "although anything like subtlety or complexity of ideas is beyond its reach, love, humour, pathos, and a certain shrewd delineation of character are distinctly within the scope of its powers". Of these possibilities, Byron allows the characters in his Dialogues a most delightful play of humour. The dialogue is so natural in these dialect pieces that it must be surmised thatanother aptitudeof our versatile author was not allowed to come to fruition. Apart from the epilogue to Hurlothrumbo, he never attempted any dramatic composition.

It must not be imagined that the vernacular was Byron's usual vehicle of expression, but he does sprinkle it like salt throughout his Journal and letters, imparting to them a literary flavour they would not otherwise possess. Whiteley's interesting comment on this feature of 18th Century literature is, that by the introduction of the vernacular into their writings, Byron and others like him "kept the current of English vocabulary fed with fresh streams of idiomatic speech and prevented standard literature from becoming anaemic through mere refinement ..... Thus racy and vigorous words of the 18th Century dialect speakers, words of unimpeachable lineage were kept alive, and at the same time, the full-blooded, able-bodied recruits from the vernacular, re-invigorated the vapid and attenuated conventions of 18th Century English vocabulary and literature."[1]

These are the qualities which have made "John Shadow" into a very substantial reality in the world of letters, together with his amazing facility in turning his thoughts into verse. It is very doubtful if anywhere else there can be found such an amazing variety of learned, critical, and religious subjects discussed in verse as in Byron's Miscellaneous Poems. His mind expressed itself in rhyme just as readily as most men's did in prose. This may account for a good deal of the mediocrity in his work, for so much of it gives one the impression that it was just dashed off hurriedly without any attempt to revise or polish

1. Wesley's England p.264.

it. Even the original copy of "Christians Awake!" shows remarkably few signs of alteration. But is this haste altogether to be deplored? The criticism that Byron's work, like Wordsworth's or Burns', or the music of Sibelius, is uneven and patchy in quality is tantamount to saying that a creative artist should either produce a masterpiece or destroy any inferior work. Then all poetry would be after the pattern of Gray's "Elegy". The freshness and spontaneity of Burns and Wordsworth spring from their ability to relax, sometimes allowing their lines merely to flow. To an even greater degree this is true of Byron, and it is part of his charm. His poetry rarely touches the heights, but it is delightfully straightforward and without the watchful strain of avoiding the commonplace.

This prolific output of verses of varying degrees of quality was closely bound up with his theory of poetry, which was in reality the theory held by his contemporaries. Poetry was just prose presented in a more pleasing and effective manner, or as it has been stated disparagingly "Just prose in full dress":-

> Her's the judicious and the friendly part
> To clear the head, to animate the heart;
> Their kindred forces, tempering, to unite;
> Grave to instruct, and witty to delight;
> With judgment cool, with passions rightly warm,
> She gives the strength to numbers and the charm".
>
> "The decks, when call'd, when honour'd to attend
> On sacred piety, her best lov'd friend,
> Decks with a grace, and arms with a defence,
> Religion, virtue, morals, and good sense;
> Whatever tends to better human mind
> Sets Hel. at work, a friend to all mankind".[1]

As to the effectiveness of rhymed verse compared with prose, Byron was in no doubt. In a letter dated 3rd September 1751, to a friend in town, he writes "I have sent you the verses[2] which you desire a copy of. The book that gave occasion to them has treated the subject whereon they are made in such a brief, sensible, and lively manner as might well excite one to an attempt of this nature. Just and improving sentiments deserve to be placed in any light that may either engage the attention

1. Dulces ante omnia musae. Poems Vol.1 p.164 2. "Enfusiasm" Poems Vol.2 p.179.

of a reader or assist his memory, and verse, as I have found by experience does both; for which reason, when I first met an account of Enthusiasm so quite satisfactory, I chose to give it the dress wherein it now appears before you".[1]

He outlines his views on the art of English poetry in "An Epistle to a Friend".[2] They may be summarised briefly as follows - the aim of poetry is to express good-sense in a graceful manner, using words in a succinct and exact way; the art must be hidden and therefore natural, no devices must be used which call attention to the cleverness of the art. But poetry must possess individuality, or as we would say, "character", there should be the impress of originality on it. The aim of the poet should be clear, he must have one clear point round which everything else centres, or from which everything else grows, in other words, there must be unity of theme. Along with this the aim should be ethical, for the poet will keep his readers in mind all the time . There is little in such a view with which most people would be disposed to quarrel, it is sound, and for certain kinds of poetry, admirable. Indeed for all kinds of poetry it is necessary, but with some show of reason it might be contended that such a view is too inadequate, and so it supports the jibe previously stated, namely, that poetry for Byron was "just prose in full dress".

Although such a theory is open to criticism, it is clear that this is the key to the understanding of a great deal of Byron's work. It explains his application of the poetic art to every kind of subject, some of which were better fitted for the vehicle of prose. A river may be a fit subject for the poetic muse, but scarcely a canal. - or a Mince Pie.[3] It also throws light on his contempt for blank verse. He was always ready to enter the lists against anyone who praised the merits of unrhymed poetry. On one occasion he entered into friendly combat with Roger Comberback. No literary contest could have been conducted on a more friendly basis or have ended so free from rancour. Byron's case was presented in

1. Ibid. p.168. 2. Poems Vol.1 p.394. 3. Poems Vol.1 p.206

"A defence of Rime"[1], where he criticises the affected/pomp of blank verse and commends the varied grace of rhyme, he points out the ease with which rhymed verse is read and maintains that it is most natural to English idiom.

> "Descriptive beauties that with Horace vie
> In British lyrics, want the British tie;" [2]

Prior to this contest he had put down some "Thoughts on Rime and Blank Verse"[3] in which he was chiefly concerned in correcting the notion that rhymed verse was too fettered and jingling. His reply is not without point but it must be admitted that Byrom gave occasion for such a criticism by his frequent use of what has been called the "cantering metre".[4] It is therefore for a specific reason not merely on aesthetic grounds or because of a personal aptitude, that he chooses rhyme,

> "Since different ways of telling may excite
> In diff'rent minds attention to what's right,
> And men (I measure by myself) sometimes,
> Averse to reas'ning, may be taught by rimes, -
> If, where one fails, they will not take offence,
> Nor quarrel with the words, but seek the sense". [5]

In the light of his theory of the function of poetry, it can also be readily seen why he turned his attention so often to the paraphrasing of prose works. It is very doubtful, to say the least, whether inferior poetry is likely to be more effective or even more pleasing, than first-class prose, it may be painting the lily, and in this respect Byrom does lay himself open to criticism. Especially is this true in relation to his paraphrasing of Scripture. Yet, the popularity of the Metrical Psalms and Paraphrases with Presbyterian congregations indicates that a real service can be done in this direction. Undoubtedly more Psalms are memorised by children in Scotland than anywhere else, because of the metrical version. Not only to memorise but to enable his contemporaries to become acquainted with Scripture was the aim of Byrom's Scripture Paraphrases. To a much greater extent he turned the writings of William Law into verse. This writer of lucid English was, in Leslie Stephen's words "Too little in harmony with his age to be understood".[6] Byrom consequently

1.Poems Vol.1 p.413. 2.Ibid. p.422. 3.Ibid p.388. 4.Ibid p.xxviii
5. An Epistle to a Gentleman of the Temple Poems Vol.2 p.164
6. English Thought in the 18th Century Vol.1 p.165.

devoted much attention to his works in order that he might popularise them. He kept so close to the text of the original author that his translation from prose to verse is a commentary on his religious thought. Byrom's first experiment was to paraphrase a part of Law's "Serious Call" which appeared under the title of "The Pond", but "Enthusiasm", "Epistle to a Gentleman in the Temple", "A Prayer" and others were to follow. Indeed Law jocularly remarked that Byrom "would sing his (Law's) prose out of date."

So with all his defects as a poet, Byrom had a contribution to make to the religious thought of his time, which is worthy of consideration. To this aspect of his work, therefore, we shall turn our attention.

Chapter IV

RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

With such a fluent pen for prose and verse, and having a well-stored and contemplative mind, we would expect to find that Byron had something to say upon a great variety of subjects. His Journal and Letters, together with almost half of his verse may be conveniently grouped under that ample word "miscellaneous", whereas his religious thought is found almost entirely in the second and third volumes (Chetham Edition) of his poetry. Hereagain a large number of subjects are examined and it will be our task to focus attention on those which were of greatest moment in his mind, and to which he most frequently makes reference. As he grew older, his interest in religious subjects deepened, ~~practically~~ to the almost total exclusion of other topics of interest. There is little in his writing to suggest growth or development in his religious thought, but it should be kept in mind that the great majority of his religious lines were produced during the last 20 years of his life. Released from the necessity of teaching shorthand for a living, with more ample means and time for meditation, more frequent contributions flowed from his pen.

Byron seemed fated to be associated with minority movements, finding himself unable to agree whole-heartedly with any particular school of thought. This is not very surprising in such a careful thinker, and indicates a degree of independence in forming his opinions. He was a loyal Churchman with very definite leanings to the High Church party, but regretted the insincerity of so many of the clergy and the disregard of essential Christian Truth in their preaching. His profound interest in Mysticism and the subjective aspect of religion made him look with friendly eyes in the direction of the Wesleys and the movement which they instituted, but he was too cautious to ally himself with it; he preferred to meditate upon it rather than to be actively engaged in it. An examination of the subjects which chiefly engaged his attention will reveal any distinctive or original line of thought and also show where he diverged from the orthodox positions of his time; it will

also indicate those features in the thought of the 18th Century which received any special emphasis in his thinking.

(1) The Bible

Whenever the Christian Faith has been the subject of enquiry and analysis, the Bible, and in particular, its authority has come in for its share of investigation and criticism. This is inevitable, for the ideas, and often the aberrations, of Christian belief, have had their roots in the Old and New Testaments. Christianity is a historical religion and stands or falls by the truth of a series of facts in space and time: these facts are recorded in the Bible. It is the citadel of the Gospel and any real attempt to change or modify the Christian Faith cannot ignore the record of the Christian Revelation. Nor were those who lived in the early 18th Century ignorant of this fact. Biblical Criticism of course as we know it to-day was an unknown science, though Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other Reformers had expressed critical opinions on the books of the Bible. Luther, for example, had suggested that the Epistle to the Hebrews might have been written by Apollos. It was not until the year 1753 however that real Biblical Criticism began - "The clue to a scientific treatment of the Pentateuch was first discovered by Jean Astruc. He was a Roman Catholic physician and published anonymously in 1753 a book[1] which was of epoch making importance. He started from the observation that in some narratives in Genesis the Divine name used was Yahweh, and in other sections it was Elohim".[2] This definite beginning in Biblical Criticism had its precursors in the age of rationalism. A good deal of sniping against the authority of Scripture was taking place, and some of the bullets of criticism were finding their mark. The Bible in the hands of the Clergy had ceased to be the inspired Word of God, it had no message for the preacher, and therefore none for the people. A text was used as a point of departure rather than a source of inspiration for a discourse from the pulpit. Byrom complains bitterly about this in his "Familiar Epistles to a Friend".

1. Conjectures sur les memoirs originaux dant il parait que Moyse s'est servi pour composer le Livre de la Genèse.
2. The Bible, its origin, significance, and abiding worth, p.114, Peake.

"What makes it sermon is the text prefixt,
Tho' scarce a word of it is intermixt; -
Consistently enough, for it has none
Which suit the topics that he dwells upon -
Topics without a dignity to grace
Text, office, audience, person, time or place!" [1]

Byrom had a great veneration for the Bible, which he read in the original languages, and it was his belief that the preacher's duty was to expound it. In the previous century the pulpit had also been the platform from which to advocate political opinions. It was the only means available for reaching the people, but this medium had been supplanted in the early 18th Century by the emancipated press and a spate of political pamphlets poured from it. Yet old customs die hard, and chiefly because the majority of the Clergy had no message, they harked back to a procedure which in its day was necessary, but which had ceased to be so; forgetting that "Time makes ancient good uncouth". This point of view is expressed pithily in the short poem "On Clergymen Preaching Politics":-[2]

"Indeed, Sir Peter, I could wish, I own,
That parsons would let politics alone!
Plead, if they will, the customary plea
For such like talk, when o'er a dish of tea;
But when they teaze us with it from the pulpit,
I own, Sir Peter, that I cannot gulp it"

and especially in the last stanza

Were I a King (God Bless me!)I should hate
My chaplains meddling with affairs of state,
Nor would my subjects, I should think, be fond,
Whenever theirs the Bible went beyond.
How well, methinks, we both should live together,
If these good folk would keep within their tether!" [2]

So the modern controversy about dragging politics into the pulpit is as old as the 18th Century! It is not difficult to see in this uncompromising attitude not merely a zealous regard for the place of the Bible in Divine Worship, but also a blindness to the relationship of religion in general and the Inspired Word in particular, to the political and social conditions of the time. In this respect Byrom was a child of his age. He preferred, when he went to Church, to listen to expository preaching of a conservative kind. But the conclusion must not be drawn too hastily that he was therefore

1. Poems Vol.2 p.257. 2. Poems Vol.1 p.106.

a literalist who accepted without thought or question, all that he found in the Bible. On the other hand it would be phenomenal if we found him arriving in one leap to the position reached by the modern historical method of criticism. He accepted like others, the Mosaic authorship of Genesis[1] and would be accounted by modern standards ultra conservative in his views. Yet in two respects he was in the forefront of the movement which was to revolutionise Christian thought. In the first place he was quick to realise the dangers of Bibliolatry, and was indefatigable in counter-acting these dangers. In a treatise on "The Doctrine of Grace", Warburton claimed that the Holy Spirit was in the written revelation and therefore there was no need for direct individual revelation by the Spirit, "For", said the bishop, "His constant abode and supreme illumination is in the sacred scriptures of the New Testament". Like so many other controversialists, he was right in what he affirmed and wrong in what he denied. Throwing so much emphasis on the written Word to the disparagement of direct witness of the Spirit, laid this eminent Divine open to attack, which Byrom does most effectively in words like the following:

" 'Scripture' said he (which this account explains),-
Does not record them only, but contains, -
Contains in capitals: as if he took
The Scripture to be something more than book,
Something alive, wherein the Spirit dwelt' "

and then proceeds

"If I mistook him, or misrepresent
You'll show me where, for 'tis not with intent.
I want, if possible, to understand
A sentence coming from so fam'd a hand.
Tho' plain the words, 'tis difficult to solve
What Christian sense he meant them to involve;
In ev'ry way that words and sense agree,
'Tis perfect Bibliolatry to me.
No image-worship can be more absurd
Than idolising thus the written word." [1]

By this challenge Byrom rendered a service to what later came to be known as the view of progressive revelation. The next step in Warburton's argument or at any rate implicit in it, was the disastrous theory of flat level inspiration, according to which, a command in the earliest books of the Bible, not in accord withour ethical standards, carries as much weight

1. Familiar Epistles to a Friend Poems Vol.1 p.260.

as a command from the lips of our Lord. It was this theory which took the edge off John Newton's conscience and enabled him to carry slaves from Africa to America, and at the same time, feel no condemnation. Byrom's protest against Warburton was a blow, though in a measure an unwitting one, against this dangerous and crippling doctrine.

In the second place he was active and interested in questions of textual criticism. Having the necessary knowledge and mental equipment he made some bold ventures into this realm of study. It cannot be said that his contributions were of lasting worth or even of value in themselves, indeed they can be justly regarded as pieces of very doubtful criticism. For example, Byrom contended in "An Epistle to J.Bl-k-a Esq, "that in the story[1] where John the Baptist's food is mentioned, the word akpides should be translated "tops of plants" rather than "locusts". To support his argument he points out the prima facie improbability of anyone eating locusts and then quotes in confirmation Isidorus, one of the Greek Fathers. Obviously, the evidence is very slender and quite insufficient to support his case. Even more improbable is his argument for David's belief in immortality, which runs as follows - Bathsheba said to the dying king "Let my lord king David live for ever",[2] but this was an impossible greeting to a person who was known to be dying, unless the wish was expressed in relation to the future life. In point of fact, it may strike us as being incongruous in that particular situation, but only requiring the very simple reason of use and wont for its explanation. The point of interest in these cases, however, is not in their doubtful or absurd conclusions, but in the fact that attention was directed to such matters.

Byrom's really positive contribution to Biblical interpretation was founded upon his mysticism and view of inspiration. Orthodox Churchmen and Deists alike were seeking a definition of the term "inspiration". Warburton was very conscious of the many inaccuracies in the Scripture text, he believed that there were about 30,000 such cases, but in company with more orthodox Churchmen, fought a strenuous rear-guard action for the objective

1. Matt.3 [5]. 2. 1 Kings 1.

authority of the Bible. The traditional view of Christendom had been that the Book was the revelation, rather than that it contained the record of it. Whenever expounders of Scripture got into difficulties with historical, or scientific facts, they fell back upon allegorical interpretation As certain portions of Scripture did not agree with their preconceived views of inspiration, then the words must mean something other than they say. St.Augustine laid down two rules for those who would interpret the Bible. "The first is to hold the truth of Scripture without wavering; the second is that since Holy Scripture can be explained in a multiplicity of senses, one should adhere to a particular explanation only in such measure as to be ready to abandon it, if it be proved with certainty to be false; lest Holy Scripture be exposed to the ridicule of unbelievers, and obstacles be placed to their believing".[1] This loop-hole was used, not only by the early Church Fathers, but continued to be used by the Clergy of the 18th Century. Just because Warburton, and others in similar positions of authority, felt the responsibility of withstanding the onslaught of Deism

only gradually did they give up the generally accepted view of inspiration. Byrom's mind was dimly aware of another approach to the question of revelation and inspiration. He believed that the written word only came to life when the individual reader was also inspired by the Holy Spirit. He held to the view that the Bible contained the Revelation of God, but that such inspired truth could only be apprehended by a mind which was itself inspired; or as the late Archbishop of Canterbury puts it " living apprehension of a living process wherein those whose minds are enlightened by divine communion can discern in part the purposive activity of God".[2] In this, Byrom approximates very closely to the views held by many modern Bible scholars, a midway position between verbal inspiration and looking upon scripture as so many ancient historical documents, and nothing more than that. Three notable figures in the realm of Biblical Criticism may be quoted in support of this. Dr.Denney writes "In Protestant scholasticism this glorious Gospel has again been lost oftener than once; it is lost when a learned Ministry deals with the New Testament writings as a scribe dealt

1.Quotation from Nature, Man & God p.310 - William Temple. 2. Ibid. p.312.

with the Old; it is lost also - for extremes meet - when an unlearned piety swears by verbal, even by literal inspiration, and takes up to mere documents an attitude which in principle is fatal to Christianity"[1], and again "No written word, as such, can ever be pleaded against the voice of the Spirit within. Even the words we call in an eminent sense 'inspired' words of the Spirit, are subject to this law".[2] A scholar of the more radical school, Dr.A.S.Peake in his book "The Nature of Scripture" corroborates this view. In the chapter bearing the significant title "The verification of revelation in experience" he says "A very large number of passages come home to the soul with immediate and self-authenticating power. And it is these passages which sustain the average reader's estimate of the Bible"[3]. One more short quotation from Edward Grubb's "The Bible: its nature and inspiration". "The inspiration of the Bible, then, is something that we learn to recognise for ourselves, it has real meaning for us as we come to perceive and feel it - just as the beauty of a great picture, or the power of a great poem, must be felt and perceived by ourselves if for us it is to be a reality".[4] This was essentially the attitude taken up by John Byrom to the Bible. He rationalised as far as he was able, and where he failed to understand he suspended judgment. But above and beyond all, the authority and inspiration of the Bible found its verification in his own religious experience. In contrast to the view generally taken by the clerics of his time, he believed that this was the more credible view of inspiration, and the wisdom of the ages has justified him.

"'Tis in this point, undoubtedly the main,
That Sacred Books do differ from profane.
They do not ask so much for letter'd skill
To understand them, as for simple will.
For as a single or clear-sighted eye
Admits the light like an unclouded sky,
So is the truth, by scripture-phrase design'd,
Received into a well-disposed mind
By the same Spirit, ready to admit
The written word, as they possess'd who writ -
Who writ, if Christians do not vainly boast,
By inspiration of the Holy Ghost".5

1. 2 Cor. p.125 The Expositor's Bible. 2. Ibid. p.135. 3. p.229.
4. p.224. 5. On the right use of Holy Scriptures Poems Vol.2 p.132.

(2) Moral Values

It is a pleasing feature in the work of one who was so much influenced by the Mystics, that it contains a very notidable ethical content. The danger of mysticism has always lain in its tendency to divorce religion from ethics. This is so , especially in Eastern religions, as for example in Hinduism where holiness is equated with contemplation, it is apparent in the early development of the Christian Faith in the rise of monasticism, its danger can be recognised later in Molther's doctrine of "stillness". It is all the more to Byrom's credit that he should give such an important place in his thinking to Christian Ethics, when it is remembered that he was such an ardent admirer of Antoinette Bourignon, whose style of writing may justly be termed 'luscious'. It would be untrue to say that there was a moral passion burning like a fire in his bones, but his natural caution, his clear mind, and above all, his love of life and of good fellowship, kept his feet on the ground when his head was in the air.

No one can read even casually through the poems of John Byrom without becoming vividly aware that in his ethical system, there were certain moral values which he prized more than others and regarded as of primary importance in life. He was not an original philosopher nor did he seem to have more than a passing interest in the philosophical speculations of his time. It might even be said that he was lacking in curiosity as far as the ultimate reality of things was concerned. From his writings and reading, the latter so often noted in his Journal, it can be gleaned that he was not ignorant of the speculative thinking of his time. He devotes a short poem to the consideration of "The Constitution of Human Nature, as represented in the systems of modern philosophers".[1] There is little doubt that the school of philosophy which he had in mind was that headed by Francis Hutcheson, and known as "The Common Sense School", or "Moral Sense School". Hutcheson's psychological theory of the constitution of human nature being passion plus reason is criticised, and in the same poem there is an allusion to the basic doctrine in Locke's philosophy, that there are no innate ideas,

1. Poems Vol. 1 p.240.

"With new Ideas, none of them innate"[1] there is no mystery in the origin of our moral instincts. Locke's chief aims had been to expose empty verbalism and to free men's minds from the bondage of unproved assumptions, his philosophy was a revolt against authority and dogmatism. As A.C.Fraser sums it up "Locke's war against the 'innate' is in its spirit human understanding in revolt against the despotism of dogmas which disdain to be verified by facts, and against words and phrases for which there are no corresponding ideas or meanings".[2] This was not a denial of intuition, but an attempt to urge men to submit their intuitions to the test of reason and so find whether they were self-evident or demonstrable truths. Outlining Locke's thought on the point of intuition W.R.Sorley writes "The real existences to which knowledge extends are self, God, and the world of nature. Of the first we have, says Locke, an intuitive knowledge, of the second a demonstrative knowledge, of the third a sensitive knowledge. This view he proceeds to explain and defend. Locke holds that the existence of the self is known by immediate intuition".[3] This is not the place for a detailed analysis of Locke's philosophy but it is evident Byrom's mysticism could scarcely allow him to agree with such reasoning. In the chapter entitled "Of our knowledge of the Existence of a God" Locke writes "I presume I may say, that we more certainly know that there is a God, than that there is anything else without us. When I say we know, I mean there is such a knowledge within our reach, which we cannot miss, if we will but apply our minds to that, as we do to several enquiries".[4] Byrom's reply to this would be of course that our knowledge of God, is not founded on demonstration but on direct confrontation. It must be recalled also that on one occasion he crossed controversial swords with Bishop Butler. A most interesting and full record of this argument is found in the Journal under the date 28th March 1737, when Butler contended for the use of reason in religion, and Byrom for authority. It appears from the record that Butler had the better of the argument, though Byrom was by no means routed, and indeed in some respects was nearer the truth than his adversary. He writes

1. Ibid. p.242. 2. "Locke" p.113 Blackwood's Philosophical Classics.
3. A History of English Philosophy p.120. 4. An essay concerning Humane understanding Book IV Ch.X Locke. Works Vol.2 p.190

"Man had a heart capable of being faithful as well as a head capable of being rational and that religion applied itself to the heart. If either (Butler or Mr.Lloyd) were like me, it was not reason that convinced but probably the reading of some life of a true Christian believer".[1] This is in line with modern theological thought for Dr.John Baillie writes "More and more, then, the thought of our time seems to be converging towards such a view as that expressed by Professor Tillich when he writes: 'Arguments for the existence of God presuppose the loss of the certainty of God. That which I have to prove by argument has no immediate reality for me' "[2]

We would therefore conclude that Byrom was very well acquainted with the philosophical thought of his time, but his ethics grew, not out of his philosophical speculation, but rather out of his theological pre-suppositions. The themes which recur with persistent regularity are "Contentment" "Patience", 'Humility," and "Tolerance. These are such as we would expect from the pen of a man so mild and gentle of disposition, who by nature was reflective rather than active. The ancient moralists grouped the four virtues, wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice, together, as the sum-total of the good life. But although our Author was no mean classical scholar he was opposed to making Greek philosophy the basis of living. He appreciated the broadening effect of culture from whatever source it came, and expresses this view in "Dulces ante omnia musae" as follows:-

"No sour pedantic rage
No viscious rant defiles her freest page,
She looks on various empires, various men
As all one tribe, when she directs the pen."[3]

Notwithstanding this appreciation he was afraid of a phenomenon which in our time is causing theologians and Biblical scholars some concern. In the preface to his Ferndley-Hartley Lecture Professor Norman Snaith writes "The aims of Hebrew religion was Da ath Elohim (the knowledge of God), the aim of Greek thought was Gnothi seauton (know thyself). Between these two there is a great gulf fixed. We do not see that either admits of any compromise. They are fundamentally different in a priori assumption, in method of approach, and in final conclusion. Traditional Christianity has sought to

1. Remains Vol.2. p.97. 2. Our knowledge of God p.177. 3. Poems Vol.1 p.166.

find a middle way, combining Zion and Greece into what is held to be a harmonious synthesis. The New Testament has been interpreted according to Plato and Aristotle, and the distinctive Old Testament ideas have been left out of account."[1] It was this synthesis of which Byrom was more than suspicious. In some measure this may account for the prevalence of what have been termed 'the passive ethical virtues' which engage his attention. It is true that patience, humility, contentment, and tolerance are only sub-divisions of Paul's "Faith, hope, and love", and are not negative but intensely positive virtues. This has been stated finely by A.B.Alexander "The pagan conceptions of virtue were materialistic, temporal, and self-regarding. Christ showed that without the spirit of love even such excellences as courage, temperance, and justice did not attain to their true meaning or yield their full implication. Paul, as we have seen, did not disparage heroism, but he thought that it was exhibited as much, if not more, in patience and forgiveness as in self-assertion and retaliation. What Christianity really revealed was a new type of manliness, a fresh application of temperance, a fuller development of justice. It showed the might of meekness, the power of gentleness, the heroism of sacrifice"2. But as regarded by Byrom, there is a lack of this virile positive quality. None would feel disposed to quarrel with the truth, as far as it goes, of such lines as these:-

"Content is better, all the wise will grant,
Than any earthly good that thou canst want;
And discontent, with which the foolish fill
Their minds, is worse than any earthly ill".[3]

or

"It is as fine a flower that can be found
Within the mind's best cultivated ground;
Where like a seed, it must have light and air
To help its growth, ..." [4]

or

"Men use the ill; - that fault is theirs alone
But if thou use thyself ill, that's thy own.
Meekness and patience is much better treasure."[5]

1. Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament. 2. Christianity and Ethics p.194.

3. "Content" Poems Vol.2 p.532. 4. "A dialogue on Contentment poems Vol.1 p.124.

5. "A Soliloquy" Poems Vol.2 p.104.

It is when this simple question is asked "What is the nature of the motives which prompted such an interpretation of Christian Ethics?" that it is realised that the motives were mixed. In criticism it can be said that the desire for patience and contentment, in the mind of Byrom was just another form of hedonism. It is, however, well known that Christianity itself has sometimes been charged with being little more than enlightened self-interest. A mistaken emphasis on the future life to the exclusion of any consideration for the present, has given rise to this accusation. Similarly, there is too great an insistence on the ultimate happiness resulting from the possession of the "passive" virtues, rather than upon the desirability of such a disposition for its own sake. Yet in all fairness it ought to be said that Byrom was in line with his contemporaries in stressing prudential motives as the reason for following the Christian way of life. This of course is not the whole truth with regard to his ethical code or the motives behind it. The contentment and patience which receive such ample treatment are a direct corollary of his view of Providence and the Will of God. It has often been affirmed that we are all Calvinists when we are on our knees, and however much Byrom might oppose the doctrine in his other verses, he appears to be Calvinistic in his view of the Sovereignty of God when he deals with Contentment, humility and patience. That this is only an appearance may be judged in the light of W.R.Sorley's penetrating analysis of the problem. It is well stated in the following quotation "The spirit of God is conceived as working in and through the spirit of man, but in such a way as not to destroy human freedom. So long as we regard the divine influence as a quasi-mechanical force such a conception is impossible. But it is no longer so when we apply to the problem the idea of God as love. Love works through freedom. Compulsion or threats interfere with freedom; but in love spirit appeals to spirit in virtue of their fundamental affinity".[1] Byrom certainly did possess the idea of God as love, to a sentimental or benevolent degree. The weakness of his view - not a necessary weakness in the conception of the Sovereignty

1. Moral Values and the Idea of God p.495.

of God, but very apparent in our author - is the tendency for it to degenerate to the level of laissez-faire doctrine. These lines are eloquent on the point -

" Folk cry'n out 'hard times', but I never regard,
For I ne'er did, nor will set my heart upo' th' ward;
(world)
So 'tis all one to me, bin they easy or hard,
Which nobody can deny etc.
I envy not them that have thousands of pounds,
That sport o'er the country with horses and hounds;
There's nought but contentment can keep within bounds
Which nobody can deny etc.

.....

In short my condition, whatever it be,
'Tis God that appoints it, as far as I see;
And I'm sure I can never do better than He
Which nobody can deny etc." [1]

We can trace the movement of his mind with regard to contentment still further, to the point where contentment merges into resignation. His interpretation of Our Lord's words "Thy Will be done" simply mean "Thy Will be endured". This view is indubitably expressed in the verses "On Resignation"[2] and again in the poem "On Bearing the Cross".[3] This negative approach to the great Christian virtues of humility, contentment, patience, and tolerance, was not indicative of a strong conception of social duty. It has been such interpretations of Christian ethics which have given point to gibes similar to that which G.Bernard Shaw uses in his play "Major Barbara". The dialogue runs as follows:-

Undershaft - "All religious organisations exist by selling themselves to the rich.
Cusins - Not the Army. That is the Church of the poor.
Undershaft - All the more reason for buying it.
Cusins - I don't think you quite know what the Army does for the poor.
Undershaft - Oh yes I do. It draws their teeth:"

What contribution then had Byrom to make in this field of religious thought, where he was neither original nor fired with enthusiasm for personal or social reform? The answer to this question is similar to that given by Robert Burns and Thomas Hardy, finding simple things a big enough medium for the portrayal of immortal truth. In a less degree John Byrom made his modest

1. Contentment Poems Vol.1 p.114. 2. Poems Vol.2 p.355. 3. Ibid. p.370.

contribution to truth by making the simple memorable. The following lines reveal him in his happiest vein and re-echo the sentiments of the Scottish bard.

"Why, prithee now, what does it signify
For to bustle and make such a rout?
It is virtue alone that can dignify,
Whether clothed in ermine or clout,
Come, come, and maintain thy discretion,
Let it act a more generous part;
For I find by thy honest confession,
That the world has too much of thy heart".[1]

and this short quotation from his lines on "Humility" indicate his ability to couch a simple theme in choice and not easily forgotten language.

"Profound humility! Of every grace
That vitue of a God made Man takes place, -
Wise as an old man, simple as a child,
Like a youth courageous, like a suckling mild;" [2]

(3) "Enthusiasm"

In any estimate of John Byrom's religious thought, some consideration must be given to the subject of "enthusiasm", if for no other reason than that it was the title and theme of one of his longest poems. It was also a production of genuine literary merit which elicited hearty commendation from Bishop Warburton, even though his views were attacked in the poem. This was a splendid tribute not only to Warburton's manly chivalry, but also to Byrom's literary skill. It is difficult for us in this age to appreciate the zeal of the protagonists in this contest over "enthusiasm". We are tempted to ask "Was it not 'much ado about nothing', a meaningless ecclesiastical wrangle in an age given over to controversy, and therefore unworthy of our time and attention?" Before arriving at a definite conclusion we had better ask what the word really means, what were its associations, its possible interpretations, and its relation to contemporary thought.

In 200 years the word has almost received an entirely new connotation, to-day it is a word of commendation, but in the middle of the 18th Century it carried a stigma of the most opprobrious odium. It was to be feared and shunned, for to be regarded as an enthusiast was at once to lose caste in the eyes of genteel society. John Locke's influence on the thought of the early part of the 18th Century can scarcely be exaggerated, his views on religion

1. A Song Poems Vol.1 p.115. 2. Poems Vol.2 p.63.

and philosophy were the accepted furnishings of the educated and enlightened mind. He was able to focus and clarify what men wanted to believe or believed only in a vague way; "he gave his age just what it was ready to receive, a reasoned plea for toleration and a demonstration of the Reasonableness of Christianity. It was Locke's appointed task to work up into a system, all the assumptions about God, Nature and Man which, as the seventeenth century storm clouds drew off, seemed to most men to stand firm and unquestionable in the light of common day".[1] After the turmoil of the preceding century men were suspicious of fanaticism or enthusiasm, and it was Locke who not only put the case for the average man and confirmed him in his attitudes, but also gave direction to subsequent thought on this subject. Calmly he reasons "Their Minds being thus prepared, whatever groundless Opinion comes to settle itself upon their Fancies, is an illumination of the Spirit of God, and presently of divine Authority". He goes on "This I take to be properly Enthusiasm, which though founded neither on Reason, nor Divine Revelation, but rising from the Conceits of a warmed or over-weening Brain, works yet, where it once gets footing, more powerfully on the Perswasions and Actions of men, than either of those two, or both together:"[2] With more or less consistency later writers took up this argument, some showing so much vigour in the advocacy of their point of view that they in turn might justly have been accused of enthusiasm.

"The Spectator" of 20th October 1711 defines enthusiasm as "a kind of excess in devotion" "Enthusiasm has something in it of madness, superstition, or folly. Most of the sects that fall short of the Church of England have in them strong tinctures of enthusiasm, as the Roman Catholic religion is one huge overgrown body of childish and idle superstitions". Shaftesbury modifies this view and used less vituperative language in his "Letter on Enthusiasm" 1711, where he describes it as a false belief in a supernatural influence, in contrast to real Divine inspiration. While he disliked religious enthusiasm intensely, he objected still more strongly to any suppression of those holding unpopular views. Yet he was not averse to the use of ridicule in his attacks upon enthusiasm. As Sorley puts it "He never said that ridicule was the test of truth;

1. The Seventeenth Century Background p.267. Basil Willey.
2. An Essay concerning Human Understanding

but he did regard it as a specific against superstition; and some of his comments, in illustration of this thesis, not unnaturally gave offence".[1] It is readily understood that the ecclesiastical controversialists who relied solely upon the weapon of reason for the defence of the Faith, should pour scorn and ridicule upon enthusiasm. It was a religious language of which they had no knowledge and one which they had no desire to learn. Bishop Gibson of London issued in 1739 "A Pastoral Letter" against "Lukewarmness and Enthusiasm", and in 1752 Bishop Hurd published a sermon on "The mischiefs of Enthusiasm and Bigotry"; and most unrestrained of all, in 1747, Bishop Lavington's "The Enthusiasm of Methodists, and Papists Compared", For precision and economy of language Warburton's letter to Byrom on the subject cannot be ignored, the last sentence of the following extract sets forth not only his own view of the matter but also the views of the majority of Christian Apologists "You suppose enthusiasm consists in the mind's being carried with eagerness and violence towards its object. I imagine this alone does not constitute the passion, and that justly to charge the mind with this weakness you should add that, in its progress for the establishment of the supposed truth which it makes its object, the conviction of its conclusions exceeds the evidence of its principles."[2]

When John Wesley contemplated going to Georgia in the year 1735 to take up missionary work among the colonists, before arriving at a definite decision, he consulted with several of his friends, among them, William Law, The latter's advice was summed up in a phrase which accords little with his subsequent judgment, for it is alleged that he looked upon Wesley's venture as that of "a crack-brained enthusiast". If it was strange for William Law to allow his usually independent and clear judgment to be so much influenced by current prejudice, it is even more surprising to hear John Wesley repudiating any connection with it. In 1761 he was prepared to defend it openly, but 16 years later his judgment had become much more conservative. Contrast the following extract from the letter written to the "Author", presumably the editor, of the

1. A History of English Philosophy p.160. 2. Remains Vol.2. p.523.

Westminster Journal on Monday 5th January 1761 with a tract published in 1777, entitled "Plain Account of Christian Perfection". The former reads "There is 'gone abroad', says he (the correspondent) 'an ungoverned spirit of enthusiasm, propagated by knaves, and embraced by fools'. Suffer me now to address the gentleman himself. Sir, you may call be both a knave and a fool: but prove me either the one or the other if you can. 'Why you are an enthusiast'. What do you mean by the term? A believer in Jesus Christ? An asserter of His equality with the Father, and of the entire Christian revelation? Do you mean one who maintains the antiquated doctrines of the new birth and justification by faith? Then I am an enthusiast. But if you mean anything else, either prove or retract the charge".[1] But in the tract he gives his followers this advice. "Beware of that daughter of pride, enthusiasm. O keep at the utmost distance from it! Give no place to a heated imagination." He continues "You are in danger of enthusiasm every hour, if you depart ever so little from Scripture; yea,or from the plain literal meaning of any text, taken in connexion with the context. And so you are, if you despise or lightly esteem reason". He then proceeds to give warnings "One general inlet to enthusiasm is, expecting the end without the means", "The very desire of 'growing in grace' may sometimes be an inlet of enthusiasm". "I say yet again, Beware of enthusiasm" "Beware of Antinomianism 'making void the law', or any part of it 'through faith'. Enthusiasm naturally leads to this".[2]

What were the factors which made it possible for men who in some cases were ecclesiastical enemies, with different outlook and experience to agree in their condemnation of enthusiasm? To be hostile to something which would find such ready acceptance to-day? No doubt the underlying cause was the rationalistic spirit of the age. As Lecky says "Men became half-belivers. Strong religious passions of all kinds died away".[3] The Christian apologists and the Deists both appealed to reason for the support of their case, no place was given to the emotions at all. Therefore anything which bore the slightest trace of enthusiasm was scorned by the large multitude who were adherents, if not advocates of Deism, and also by the orthodox leaders of thought in the Established Church. There was also an element of social snobbery at work.

1. Wesley's Works Vol.3 p.33 1856 Edn. 2. A Plain account of Christian Perfection Works Vol.II pp.411-13 1856 Edn.
3. History of England in the 18th Centy. Vol.3 p.310.

in the outcry against enthusiasm. The common people, artisans generally, were most affected by the Evangelical Revival, and it was the doctrine of Assurance which was a main contributory cause to the release of enthusiasm. Because they were sure of their religious experience and forgiveness, they exulted in a new found happiness, for as Dr.Bett points out, one can't be happy about anything of which one is not sure. But contemporary society thought it was insolence on the part of the common people to assume a knowledge of which they, the elite, were ignorant. It was therefore because of this association that enthusiasm was suspect. The third reason for antagonism has special significance in its relation to Byrom's thought, and explains Wesley's wavering attitude towards it. Byrom was saturated in the mysticism which was, and is, so often a bye-product of enthusiasm. More must be said of this relationship between Byrom and the Wesleys at a more convenient stage in our study. Here again, mysticism was not popular with the majority of religious people, it was looked upon as an approach to religion adopted by cranks, a little off-shoot from the main branch of Christian thought followed only by very eccentric people. Against this vast alliance of ecclesiastical and deistic opposition, John Byrom put up a doughty defence for enthusiasm. In the poem entitled "Enthusiasm" he gives a very different definition of it from those already cited; he asks the question

" 'What is enthusiasm?' What can it be
But thought enkindled to a high degree"[1]

The argument of the poem follows very closely the line taken by William Law in "Some Animadversions upon Dr.Trapp's Reply", a reply which Trapp had made to a previous production by Law "Appeal to all that doubt or disbelieve the truths of the Gospel". It runs as follows - we are all enthusiasts about something. The question is to find the most worthy line for its expression. The most worthy line is religion. Let Byrom speak for himself.

"Its own enthusiasts each system knows
Down to lac'd fops and powder-sprinkled beaux.
Great wits, affecting what they call'to think',
That deep-immers'd in speculation sink,
Are great enthusiasts, howe'er refin'd." [2]

He elaborates and illustrates the foregoing argument and then concludes with

1. Poems Vol.2 p.181. 2. Ibid p.138,

with these really beautiful lines:-

"That man may learn infallibly aright
Blest in His Presence, seeing in His Light,
To gain the habit of a God-like mind,
To seek His Holy Spirit, - and to find.
In this Enthusiasm, advanc'd thus high,
'Tis a true Christian wish to live and die".[1]

Thus Byrom was a voice crying in the wilderness, or at least a very pronounced echo. He saw clearly that the salvation of the Church lay in the very thing of which it was so much afraid. It is easy for us, from our vantage point, to see the simplicity of the situation, but very few Churchmen in the 18th Century realised that with regard to religion, reason required emotion to give it reality and relationship to life. The ideas of the 17th Century which had represented very real experiences, were carried over into the succeeding century. Abstract terms like freedom and toleration still dominated men's minds, though they no longer represented matters of life and death. The age was interested in ideas rather than persons. It was accordingly difficult for men who breathed the cold air of rationalism and construed God in terms of moral law, to understand enthusiasm. It is difficult to feel an emotional glow about an abstraction. Byrom on the other hand loved men with a genuine warmth of heart, and he felt God to be very near to him. This was his safeguard against spurious enthusiasm. When Locke argued that enthusiasm should be submitted to the tests of Revelation and Reason, he was applying tests to guard against fanaticism for an idea, mistaken for God's direct revelation. But God is concerned much more with men than with ideas. We have seen how Byrom regarded his fellows, not as humanity in the mass, struggling for freedom and enlightenment, but as individual men in need of God and human sympathy. Nicholas Berdyaev drawn attention to this distinction in discussing fanaticism. He says "Fanaticism is a curious instance of the degeneration of personality under the influence of motives which as such are not evil and are connected with disinterested devotion to some belief or idea. A fanatic is always an idealist in the sense that an idea means more to him than concrete human beings and that for the sake of the idea he is ready to oppress, torture, and kill others - "[2]. As we have already noted, Byrom could

1. Poems Vol.2 p.197. 2. The Destiny of Man p.170.

never be a fanatic, but he was on the side of enthusiasm, and his view of it was not so much opposed to Locke's as complementary to it. Byrom's function in life was not to impart that enthusiasm to others, but rather to keep the idea steadily before their minds; to meet and silence criticism and to encourage by his reasonableness those men of action who might be overtaken by doubt.

(4) Mysticism

Whenever referenceis made to John Byrom he is usually described as a Mystic, but as Rufus M.Jones observes "Mysticism in common speech-usage is a word of very uncertain connotation".[1] Rather than define it he prefers to describe it as follows "Religious mystical experience is an intense and striking dynamic, variety of this fused, undifferentiated consciousness. The individual soul feels invaded, vitalized with a new energy, merged with an enfolding presence, liberated and exalted with a sense of having found what it has always sought, and flooded with joy".[2] Dean Inge registers his agreement with the difficulty of defining mysticism, in the following words "No word in our language - not even Socialism - has been employed more loosely than 'Mysticism'. Sometimes it is used as an equivalent for symbolism or allegorism, sometimes for theosophy or occult science; and sometimes it merely suggests the mental state of a dreamer, or vague and fantastic opinions about God and the world."[3] He gives 26 definitions, all different, from various sources[4], but he also submits a definition of his own. "Religious Mysticism may be defined as the attempt to realise the presence of the living God in the soul and in nature, or, more generally, as the attempt to realise, in thought and feeling, the immanence of the temporal in the eternal, and of the eternal in the temporal".[5] It may very well be that mysticism defies precise definition, but that certain things may be said about the experience. Certainly, it would be difficult to find all the requirements of Dean Inge's definition in the thought of Byrom. As far as he was concerned, it meant the direct fellowship between the individual soul and God. If this is accepted, not as a definition but as

1. Encyc. of Rel.& Ethics 2. Ibid. p.84 3. Christian Mysticism p. 3.
4. Ibid. p.335. 5. Christian Mysticism p. 5 W.R.Inge.

a salient feature of mysticism, then Byrom is rightly described as a Mystic, for his view point on religion is summed up in a short poem which allegorises the Byrom coat of arms, in which hedgehogs figure prominently. In the last stanza of the poem he says -

> Whatever ills your christian peace molest,
> Turn to the Source of Grace within your breast;
> There lies your safety. O that all my kin
> May ever seek it, where 'tis found, -- within!
> That soul no ills can ever long annoy,
> Which makes its God the centre of its joy".[1]

Byrom has an intense interest in and regard for the lives and writings of persons who were concerned for the culture and deepening of personal spiritual experience. It has been said that a man's religion is whatever he is interested in, and undoubtedly a great deal of truth lies in this assertion. From his early days when he travelled to Montpelier until the end of his life, the writings of the mystics enthralled him, and his interest deepened with the passing of the years. During his sojourn in France he came under the spell of Antoinette Bourignon and Father Malebranche, to which there are frequent references in his Journal. The first of these occurs in the year 1722 "Bought the works of Mr.Malbranche",[2] but a mere catalogue of references to the works of the mystics and these two in particular, during the years 1726-1730 will indicate their influence upon him.

Feb.23rd 1726 "Talked about Malebranche after our old way".

Mar. 9th 1726 " My dear, I have made a purchase - what d'ye think it is? - Father Malebranche's picture!"

Mar.14th 1727 "Who knows but in time I may be a little like your worship? for I have been reading Malebranche this last week".

Dec.22nd 1727 "We talked much about Antoinette Bourignon".

Jan. 4th 1729 "Bought Taylor's translation of Malebranche".

Mar. 3rd 1729 "Talked about F.Malebranche much".

July 17th 1730 "Reading Father Malebranche 7th Ch. 2nd. book of Morality".

There is a most interesting letter dated 16th September and probably written in the year 1730, addressed to "My dear Brother in Morality". A section of it reads as follows "We take the Father's Treatise on Morality along with

1. On the Author's Coat of Arms Poems Vol.1 p.29. 2. Remains Vol.1 p.51

us, and we all expound to the best of our capabilities; and I being the Senior Frenchman, they have been so kind to call upon me for that purpose. We have almost got through the two Books of Morality, which are indeed most admirable; and this way of talking them over lets one into the secret of them much better than one can imagine; for which reason I always wished you with us, when we called a Chapter, as our phrase is".[1]

After this date pride of place appears to have been given to Antoinette Bourignon, for not only are the references to her name and reading of her works more frequent but he penned verses in praise and defence of her life and thought. His veneration of this saintly woman is summed up in his lines "Upon Madame Antoinette Bourignon":-

"There was an innocent and holy maid,
That lov'd poor folks, wept, fasted, watch'd and pray'd:
'O Lord, take pity on my tender youth;
All men are liars - do thou teach me truth!'
God heard her prayers, and was Himself her Guide,
And she knew more than all the world beside". [2]

Nor was he content to allow attacks to be made upon her views without striking a blow in her defence. This he does in "Leslie v Bourignon" and most neatly disposes of Leslie's position in a couplet:

"But great divines can with their learned labours
See further into mill-stones than their neighbours".[3]

At greater length he countered the arguments put forward by Leslie in "The snake in the grass" which was an attack upon Quakers, among whom he incorrectly included A.Bourignon. It appears at one point that, so great was his attachment to the thought of this Flemish mystic that agreement with her point of view was a condition of his spiritual affinity with other Christians, even with William Law. On May 25th 1731 he writes "I asked him (Law) first what he thought of Mrs.Bourignon, he said he wished he could think like her, by which thou mayst guess that he and I should not much disagree about matters".[4] The influence of Bourignon upon his thought can be traced more readily by noticing the points of similarity or

1. Remains Vol.2 p.591 2. Poems Vol.3 p.66. 3. Poems Vol.2 p.68
4. Remains Vol.1 p.507.

agreement. It has been pointed out previously that Byrom found great difficulty in definitely adhering to a religious body; he was a member of the Church of England, but a critical member and a non-juror, generally dissatisfied with the clergy and unable to subscribe to their religious outlook. How closely he follows A.Bourignon in this! She was opposed to Protestants of both persuasions: to Calvinism because of its doctrine of Election and because it set limits to the freedom of the human will, to Arminianism because she alleged that 'it took no account of the Fall,' to "justification" in both because it led to the neglect of works and prevented the endeavour to reach perfection. She was likewise opposed to the Roman Church, for, writing with that church in mind she declares that "The idea that men are to be saved by morning and evening prayer or by frequent attendance at Communion has brought the world into darkness".[1] Strangely enough she was also opposed to the Quakers because they aimed at establishing a party, and also disowned the Sacraments of Baptism and The Lord's Supper. She writes "To despise the positive institutions of our Lord Jesus Christ, is a strong presumption and evidence of not being led by the Spirit of God".[2] In this attitude Byrom agreed with Antoinette Bourignon: paradoxical though it might seem, he would disagree in theory with the Church of England but would continue in practice to support it. His dislike of schism finds expression in some lines indicating also his personal loyalty to the Established Church. The poem bears the rather long Title "An expostulation with a zealous sectarist, who inveighed in bitter terms against the clergy and Church institutions". The gist of the thought is represented by the following argument:

"Prophets of old who spake against th'abuse
Of outward forms, were none of them so loose
As to condemn, abolish or forbid
The things prescrib'd; but what the people did,
Who minded nothing but the mere outside,
Neglecting wholly what it signified, -
At this neglect the prophets all exclaim'd.
No pious rites has any of them blam'd;"
.....
"The greatest friend to Christian freedom, Paul,
Intent to save, was 'ev'rything to all.'
To keep, whatever forms should rise or cease,
'Union of Spirit in the bond of peace',
Th'effects of hasty, rash, condemning zeal
He saw, and mourn'd, and labcured to repeal."[3]

oted from Antoinette
ourignon "Quietist"
50 A.R.McEwen.

1."La Lumiere du Monde" A Bourignon 2.A Warning against Quakers-preface p.xi(A.Bourig 3.Poems Vol.2 pp 517-

In particular he was suspicious of the Quakers, as his part in the Fanny Henshaw case amply illustrates. The mystical aspect of Quietism or Stillness had also a fascination for Byrom, and in this, no doubt, he was influenced by Bourignon, Fenelon, and Madame Guyon, of whose works he was a diligent student. It is impossible to say definitely how far he was influenced by Bourignon's views on the Fall or on the Atonement. There is nothing in his works to suggest that he accepted the view that the Atonement was not necessary for man's salvation and that - to quote from A.R.Macewen's exposition "The Incarnation had a place in the Divine Plan apart from the contingency of Sin".[1] On the other hand William Law was a healthy corrective to Byrom's theosophical views. This relationship will require some consideration at a more suitable point in our study.

Another moulding influence in Byrom's thought was Jacob Behmen. This German mystic's influence was felt later in our author's life and coincided with the beginning of his friendship with William Law. Byrom usually found himself in agreement with the latter, but he was unable to follow him all the way, in his very substantial acceptance of Behmen's theosophical thought. This is evident in Byrom's partial paraphrase of Law's "Way to Divine Knowledge". One looks in vain in Byrom's works for such heterdox notions as Behmen entertained with regard to the beginning of life or Gnostic emanations, he was interested in such speculations but was not greatly influenced by them. The agreement of Law and Byrom on the teaching of Behmen falls largely along two well defined lines, first that knowledge though good and necessary in its own sphere, was quite irrelevant in the matter of religion; and second that "God is all good, the only good, and there is no good besides Him".[2] This latter thought finds frequent treatment in Byrom's works and has special significance and repercussions upon his views of Regeneration. The former thought had its effect upon his views of Deism and upon his attitude to classical culture. Contempt either for the Institutional or for the Speculative elements in religion has always been one of the besetting sins of mysticism. Baron Friedrich von Hügel describes in very great detail how this comes about, for in the religious consciousness there is a

1. "Antoinette Bourignon - Quietist". p.89 Note. 2. Wks. of Wm. Law Letter vi Vol. i p.16

continuous warfare among these three elements of religion for the domination of the soul. Each strives and tends to oust the other two, to the impoverishment of the religious life. Not only is this so, but the Institutional and Emotional elements may even combine to the exclusion of the Intellectual element altogether. Baron von Hügel describes it thus " Acombination of Institutionalism and Experimentalism against Intellectualism is another not infrequent abuse, and onewhich is not hard to explain. For if external, definite facts and acts are found to lead to certain internal, deep, all-embracing emotions and experiences, the soul can to a certain extent live and thrive in and by a constant moving backwards and forwards between the Institution and the Emotion alone, and can thus constitute an ever-tightening bond and dialogue, increasingly exclusive of all else".[1] From the very acceptable and clear position outlined in the following lines:

"If you, well read in ancient books, my friend,
To publish Homer's Iliad should intend
Or Caesar's Commentaries, and make out
Some things more plain, - you have the skill no doubt,
As well provided for the work, perhaps
As one to make his baskets, one his traps.
But if you think that skill in ancient Greek
And Latin helps you of itself to seek,
Find and explain the spirit and the sense
Of what Christ said, it is a vain pretence
And quite unnatural, - of equal kind
With the endeavour of a man born blind,
Who talks about exhibiting the sight
of diff'rent colours, beautifully bright".[2]

or again where he dwells on the vanity of mere human learning:

"Of heads so fatten'd and of hearts so starv'd
A different emblem should, methinks, be carv'd.
The Owl of Athens and not Sion's Dove, -
The Bird of Learning, not the Bird of Love." [3]

it was an easy step to suspicion of all classical culture. Nevertheless Byron was out to establish a truth which has from time to time been lost sight of or at any rate relegated to a place of inferiority, that, as Dr.John Baillie puts it "Faith is a possession, not of the sharp-witted and the clear-headed, but of the truehearted and loyal. Its closest associates are always a pure heart and a good conscience."[4] He goes on

1. The Mystical Element of Religion Vol.1. p.75.
2. A dialogue from the "Way to Divine Knowledge" poems Vol.2 p.324.
3. On a Sermon Poems Vol.2 p.281.
4. The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul. John Baillie p.106.

to say "It is true that to our very great loss and confusion this aspect of New Testament teaching has frequently been lost sight of within the Christian Church, the moral conditions of belief being almost entirely forgotten and purely intellectual conditions put in their place. But here the mystics have done good service by raising their voices in ceaseless protest".[1] Byrom underlines this truth and at the same time expresses his admiration for Behmen- for the two thoughts are indissolubly linked, in the lines:

"How is it possible to judge aright
Of Heav'nly things but by a Heav'nly light, -
Contemned by Bolingbroke, by King confess'd,
By Behmen, possibly at least, possess'd?
Truly inspired, as pious minds have thought,
Jacob was known to live as he had taught,
And at his last departing moment cried,
'Now I go hence to Paradise,' - and died".[2]

It has already been noted that there was a streak of asceticism in Byrom's nature, occasioned no doubt, from his deep interest in the mystics. In every expression of Christianity there must be found some place for asceticism or self-denial, for discipleship is based on self-renunciation. These were the terms offered by our Lord "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me."[3] But asceticism as practised by the mystics had often been worked out in unpractical ways, cutting men off from their fellows, leading them to a life of contemplation or quietism. Not so in Byrom's case; the religion of the heart, in which he believed, was the inspiration of his active kindliness, so apparent in his life and character.

It can be said further, in support of the soberness and sanity of his mysticism, that it lacks that phenomenon so often associated with it namely, the hearing of voices and seeing of visions. The mysticism in which he was interested was a religious experience of the type which could be enjoyed by everyone, there was nothing outré or uncanny about it. It was a mysticism for the market place and the coffee-house, the home and the work-shop, as well as for the cloister. Byrom was a man of the world, enjoying good food, good companionship, good literature, who had found the

1. Ibid. p.106. 2. Human Reason and Divine Illumination Poems Vol.2 p.332.
3. Matt.16 v.24

mystical approach to religion satisfying, a way which might be followed by flesh and blood individuals like himself.

From the foregoing examination it can be judged that Byrom's mysticism unlike that of Bohmen and Bourignon was not immediate in the sense that he had some first hand new interpretation of the origin of sin, or of the world, or of Christian experience to give to mankind; his was the role of the apologist of something to which he had been introduced. From a wide range of theosophical thought and mystical teaching he selected that which commended itself to his judgment, and supported it, paradoxically enough, by reason and argument. For example, he cites the case of Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration as a witness to the factor of immediacy in religion which carries conviction:

"Because the prophets, here to be compar'd
As evidence of what God declar'd,
Could but originally hear and see,
And be as fully satisfied as he." [1]

or

"His words import directly, if you seek
Their genuine meaning of the Vulgate Greek
And mind the previously related scene, -
His words, I say, most evidently mean;
'We saw the Glory, heard the Voice, and thus
Have the prophetic word made sure to us;
Which ye do well to follow as a spark
That spreads a ray through places that are dark;
Till ye with us enjoy the perfect light
And want no prophecies to set you right.' "2

Following William Law, Byrom struck at the narrow conception of Church Membership and its formality in the Established Church. He never regarded the Sacraments of the Church as being valueless, and therefore it appears to be an overstatement of his case when he writes as follows in his poem "Church Communion":

"The Jews objected to his Gospel clue,
A 'What advantage therefore hath the Jew;'
Or, 'Of what use is to be circumcis'd?'
So may some Christians say, 'to be baptis'd;'
May form like questions, like conclusions draw
And urge the Church, as they did, and the Law".3

What he really was anxious to do was to establish a new and more correct scale of values for Christian fellowship. Not that sacraments had no place,

1. On Middleton Concerning Prophecy Poems Vol.2 p.215. 2. Ibid p.230.

3. Poems Vol.2. p.450.

but that they had an inferior place to the direct power of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life. He makes this plain in the same poem:

> "Whatever helps an outward Form may bring
> To Church Communion, it is not the thing,
> Nor a society, as such, nor place,
> Nor anything besides uniting Grace;
> They are but accessories at the most
> To true communion of the Holy Ghost". [1]

From these lines it appears that Byrom was not prepared to claim that mysticism alone was sufficient in apprehending reality. As surely as knowledge was an auxiliary to Faith, so were the sacraments, but the all-important factor was direct communion with the Holy Spirit. He would have agreed with Baron von Hügel when he says "Is there, then, strictly speaking, such a thing as specifically distinct, self-sufficing, purely Mystical mode of apprehending Reality? I take it, distinctly not; and that all the errors of the Exclusive Mystic proceed precisely from the contention that Mysticism does constitute such an entirely reparate, completely self-supported kind of human experience." 2. But the danger to religion in Byrom's day arose from the opposite direction, from the supposition that the Church and all for which it was guardian, together with the use of Reason, were adequate for a religious experience. Byrom replied that they were not only insufficient, but of secondary importance.

It was to this that Byrom bore witness and for which he argued. The 18th Century had little interest in and less knowledge of the mystical element of religion, Locke was the high-priest of the age; Dr.Henry Bett writes "There had been considerable interest in the mystics during the Commonwealth, but (with the exception of William Law and Dr.Byrom and their devotion to Boehme) there was little knowledge of the mystical writers during Wesley's century".[3] In an age which laid its emphasis upon rationalism and when the Church was tenuously held together by rites and ceremonies, Byrom along with a few others, prevented the fundamental truths of the Christian Faith from being overlaid and lost in a welter of secondary factors.

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1. Poems Vol.2 p.448
2. The Mystical Element of Religion Vol.II p.283. 3."The Spirit of Methodism" p.62.

(5) **Election**

"Know thyself, presume not God to scan,
The proper study of mankind is man."

wrote Pope in his "Essay on Man", and in thus writing he was throwing down a challenge to all those with Calvinistic leanings, for the basic truth of Calvinism was the assertion that - to quote the Shorter Catechism - "The chief end of man is to glorify God". The approach to religion from the God-ward side and even the study of man must first of all begin with the study of God, "The Christian estimate of man must be based not on man but on God".[1] The religious controversy originating in Augustine and Pelagius has never been completely settled nor has interest in it ever completely died down. It is therefore to be ex ected that in an era particularly conscious of and interested in theological problems, that some aspect of the classic encounter should emerge. It did emerge in the clash between a revived interest in the rival claims of Arminianism and Calvinism. While John Byrom was never an avowed protagonist on behalf of the former view, he did not hesitate to criticise the latter. Knowing him to be a man who found it difficult to take up an extreme position this criticism is to be expected, for the Calvinism of Byrom's day was little given to tolerance or flexibility. Yet on examination of Byrom's thought upon this subject it must be admitted at the outset that there were aspects of the great French Reformer's thought which Byrom did not or preferred not to understand - for the books in the Byrom library [2] on the controversy concerning Predestination are very numerous. The lash of Byrom's whip was directed chiefly to the doctrine of reprobation. In days when slavery was an accepted institution in the national, political and commercial systems, and when such a tremendous chasm divided the rich from the poor, opposition to the doctrine of reprobation was no doubt not quite so obvious and acceptable as it is to-day. We may shudder at such a rigid and chilling statement as this "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His Glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestinated

1. The Christian Estimate of Man - Cave p.154.
2. A Catalogue of the Library of the late John Byrom, preserved at Kersall Cell Manchester (Printed for private circulation only) 1848.

and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished,"[1] but the theological outlook had its counterpart in the political and social spheres of contemporary life. Therefore due credit must be given to Byron and those like him, who championed the cause of freedom.

Byron usually appeals to the common-sense of the situation, which ground after all, is not to be ignored; he was not to be carried away by formal logic or theological extravagance, as he states emphatically in the following lines:

"Flatter me not with your 'predestination',
Nor sink my spirits with your 'reprobation!'
From all your high disputes I stand aloof, -
Your Pre's and Re's, your Destin -, and your Proof,
And formal Calviniatic pretence
That contradicts all Gospel and good sense."2

And again in a short poem he points out how utterly out of character God would be acting, and in a most unreasonable manner.

"These people promise, by a formal deed,
God, and each other, to maintain a creed,
Which, on a calm, unprejudic'd review,
All sober sense would show then was not true
In ev'ry (part) - particularly one
Where reprobation is insisted on.
Do they reflect what 'reprobation' means?
The complication of all horrid scenes,
Of all the torments of the damn'd in hell -
Endless, immense! If they consider'd well,
Could they believe that an abyss of ill
Was fixed by righteous council of God's Will;" 3

If we could have asked Byron where the sources of Calvinism with its doctrines of predestination and reprobation were to be found, he would have replied, "In its view of God and its idea of imputed righteousness." Following William Law, Byron maintained that God desired and willed the universal good of all His creatures.. He says so in his poem "Universal Good, the object of the Divine Will".

1. The Westminster Confession of Faith Ch.3 sections 3 and 4.
2. Thoughts on Predestination and Reprobation Poems Vol.2 p.501.
3. The Dogma of Reprobation Poems Vol.3 p.129.

"For love Divine, as rightly understood,
Is an unalterable will to good, -
Good in the object of His blessed will,
Who never can concur to real ill;
Much less 'decree, predestinate, ordain,' -
Words oft employ'd to take His name in vain."1

and again in an exquisite little poem "The Potter and his clay", which is worth quoting at some length.

"Th' Almighty Workman's pow'r and skill
Could have no vile, but noble, ends;
His one immutable good-will
To all that He hath made extends.
This gracious, sov'reign Lord on high
By His eternal word and voice
Chose all to live, and none to die;
Nor will He ever change His choice.
.....
His all-electing love employs
All means that human race to bless,
That mortals may His heav'nly joys
By re-electing Him possess.
.....
Do thou, poor sinful soul of mine
By faith and penitence, embrace
Of doubtless, boundless love Divine
The free, the universal grace!" 2

It has been seen that while Byrom felt no great urge for the redemption of his fellow creatures, yet the great kindliness of his nature towards all who were in trouble or distress gave colour to his view of God. Like Hosea, he arrived at an estimate of God, not from logic of the head, but from the logic of the heart. His experience was different from those whom he criticised and hence his view of God was different. The difference could not be stated more clearly than in the following extract; speaking of the difference between Luther and Calvin "To the Wittenberg reformer the experience of God's forgiving love in Christ was fundamental. To the Reformed Theologians, though they recognised this, and even emphasised it, the dominating element in experience was the consciousness of the power and ordaining will of God".[3] There is no doubt that in giving the supreme emphasis to immutable decrees of God, and at the same time deprecating man's estate, that - at any rate to its critics - the God of Calvinism appeared to be very much like an Oriental potentate. Weight is given to this view by the peculiar emphasis and wording of question 7 in the Shorter Catechism. "What are the decrees of God? To which

1. Poems Vol.2 p.393. 2. Poems Vol.2 pp.312-13. 3. Protestant Thought before Kant p.98 Gogarten.

the answer is given "The decrees of God are, his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass". The same ultra-submissive relationship of man to God appears in Vinet's theology "If God be God, if man be man, the glory of God is the end of man. Man has been created to give glory to God; he is the voice given to the world to praise God; his lips, his life, his thought have no other use than to glorify God, all that he does in any other spirit is labour lost, movement without progress, so much taken from his life"1. Interpreting this theological position Workman says "God and His will were all in all; the individual was but the channel of His motions. Whether in heaven or in hell he exists merely for the pleasure of the Eternal, his every action limited and conditioned before all time by sovereign decree all is viewed, as Spinoza - the representative in philosophy of this creed - would phrase it, sub specie aeternitatis; his own nothingness has existed from all eternity, and forms part of an eternal scheme."[2] In Byrom's efforts to refute this position there is the evident tendency to regard God, not as a potentate but as an amiable, good-natured Father - and here one traces the influence of William Law upon him. In his study of Law,[3] Rev.J.B.Green gives numerous examples and quotations of this particular view-point in Law's writings, but the following short quotation indicates sufficiently the similarity between Law and Byrom in stressing "The goodness of God breaking forth into a desire to communicate the amiable nature of God. Hence it follows that good was the cause and the beginning of the creation, to all eternity God can have no thought, or intent towards the creature, but to communicate good; because He made the creature for this sole end, to receive good. ....He must always will that to it which He willed at the creation of it. This is the amiable nature of God. He is the good, unchangeable, overflowing fountain of good, that sends forth nothing but good to all eternity."[4] Both Law and Byrom found that the Biblical references to the wrath of God were opposed to the supposed amiability of God, and Byrom by a very ingenious but unconvincing theory attempted to explain it away. His own words explain his position; and echo Law's "Spirit of Love":

1. Outlines of Theology - Vinet p.149. 2. A New History of Methodism - Workman p.11.
3. John Wesley and William Law - J.Brazier Green. 4. Works of Wm.Law Vol.VII p.15 The Spirit of Prayer.

"And yet the wrath of God in Scripture phrase
Is oft express'd, and many diff'rent ways:
His 'anger', 'fury', 'vengeance', are the terms
Which the plain letter of the text affirms;
And plain, from two of the Apostle's quire,
That 'God is Love', - and 'a consuming fire'." 1
.....
The disorders in nature, - for none are in God, -
Are entitled 'His vengeance', 'His wrath' or 'His rod';
Like 'His ice' or 'His frost','His plague, famine, or sword'
That the love which directs them may still be ador'd; -" 2
.....
By a process of love from the crib to the Cross
Did the Only-Begotten recover our loss,
And show in us men how the Father is pleas'd,
When the wrath in our nature by love is appeas'd; -" 3

It has often been pointed out that the strength of Calvinism has been in its appeal to the Bible for confirmation of its truth, rather than to philosophical or theological speculations. It recognises the Bible as the only authoritative Word of God, therein is contained His will, and the duty ofman is to accept and obey this Word whether it agrees with his reason or not, "Whatever the Ruler of the world does is just and right, whether it squares with our notions or not".[4] And a little later in the same section, expounding the thought of John Calvin, the author says "The Christian life consists simply in keeping God's commands, and that not because they are good, but because they are commanded."5 To this particular view of God, again Byrom took exception. He believed that the commandments of God were good in themselves, making their own direct appeal to the conscience of man; not that God's decree made them so. This thought is expressed in The true grounds of eternal and immutable rectitude"

"The verbal question comes to this in fine:
'Is good or evil made by Will Divine,
Or such by Nature? Does Command enact
What shall be right, and then 'tis so in fact?
Or is it right, and therefore we may draw
From thence the reason of the righteous law?'" 6

1. On the meaning of wrath in Scripture Poems Vol.2 p.403. 2. Ibid p.409
3. Ibid p.409. 4. Protestant thought before Kant p. 86 McGiffert.
5. Protestant thought before Kant p. 90 "
6. Poems Vol.2 p.411.

The answer to this question is stated thus

" .....Men divide
Nature and Laws which really coincide".[1]

These extracts indicate his point of view on this subject. Such an attitude is not incompatible with Byrom's Mysticism and view of the Bible. He would not be bound by an external or objective standard of judgment. The second source of Calvinism Byrom found in Imputed Righteousness. This particular tenet of Calvinism had been revived by James Hervey in his popular theological work "Dialogues between Theron and Aspasio". Calvin had interpreted the doctrine of justification in this way "A man will be justified by faith, when, excluded from the righteousness of works, he by faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ, and clothed in it appears in the sight of God not as a sinner but as righteous. Thus we simply interpret justification as the acceptance with which God receives us into His favour and holds us for righteous, and say that this justification consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ."[2] The comment of Dr. Vincent Taylor on this passage is "This obvious reluctance to describe the justified man as righteous is due, partly to opposition to Roman teaching, and still more to a healthy desire to avoid language which might suggest a righteousness consisting of holiness and achieved excellence. In this sense, of course, the justified man is not righteous; he is righteous because, through faith in Christ the Redeemer, he gains a righteous mind".[3] With this view Byrom was in perfect agreement and gives expression to like sentiments in "Thoughts on Imputed Righteousness". He introduces the idea in these words:

"'Imputed Righteousness!' - beloved friend,
To what advantage can this doctrine tend,
If, at the same time, a believer's breast
Be not by real righteousness possest;" 4

and then proceeds to examine the case for imputed sin. He appeals to Pauline teaching for the "Regenerating life, dethroning sin", and builds up his argument, claiming that imputed righteousness is one source of Calvinistic error.

1. Ibid. p.412. 2. Institutes, III 11, 2 Calvin. H.Beveridge's Transⁿ. Vol.2. p.303.
3. Forgiveness and Reconciliation - Taylor p.70.
4. Poems Vol.2. p.486.

"This 'Imputation', which he builds upon,
Has been the source of more mistakes than one.
Hence rose, to pass the intermediate train
Of growing errors and observe the main,
That worse than pagan principle of fate,
Predestination's partial love and hate;
By which, not tied like fancied Jove to look
In stronger Destiny's decreeing book,
The God of Christians is suppos'd to will
That some should come to good, and some to ill, -
And for no reason but to show, in fine,
The extent of goodness and of wrath Divine".[1]

Not only does Byrom question the very grounds upon which Calvinism rests, but he also points out some of the errors which have emanated from it. Having assumed a definite position with regard to predestination, then other doctrines dependent upon it must be brought into conformity with it, and Byrom maintained that these views were open to criticism. There can be little doubt that he laid bare this grave danger of the a priori method of reasoning. He strikes at the fundamental weakness of the Calvinistic system, and indicates the straits to which formal logic will ultimately push those who proceed to work out a system of theology from one grand principle:

"No end of monstrous maxims that ensue
When such an article is held for true".[2]

It led to an altogether too formal view of God and of a closed universe governed absolutely and exclusively by law. Berdyaev brings out this same point in his study of the Ethics of Redemption and criticism of formalism in relation either to men or God: he says "Christianity knows no abstract moral norms, binding upon all men at all times. Therefore for a Christian every moral problem demands its own individual solution". He goes on: "Every moral act must be based upon the greatest possible consideration for the man from whom it proceeds and for the man upon whom it is directed." The only thing higher than the love for man is the love for God, Who is also a concrete Being, a Person and not an abstract idea."[3] The Science of to-day has been accused of making God a prisoner in His own world, Calvinism in the 18th Century came near to locking Him out of His own world. God was regarded as being so remote in His majesty, His decree so unalterable, that the personal, Fatherly attributes almost disappeared. In the following lines

1. Thoughts on Imputed Righteousness Poems Vol.2 p.493. 2. Ibid. p.130.
3. The Destiny of Man p.106.

Byrom takes the opposite view, where God is regarded as a person, and not merely an automaton.

> "An intervening penitence, we see,
> Could even change His positive decree,
> As in the Ninevites. If any soul
> Repent, the promise is the sure parole."[1]

The other outworking of the doctrine of predestination, and its associated doctrine, reprobation, was found in the interpretation given to the Fall. For the sake of consistency, it required that God should predestine The Fall from all eternity or at least permit it, without actually ordaining it; the former interpretation bore the name of supralapsarianism, and the latter, sublapsarianism. Byrom criticises these related doctrines in his lines:

> "This paper, pushing to the last extreme
> The most horrendous reprobating scheme
> Will have no sin to intervene between
> Damning decree, committed or foreseen.
> Men are rejected, reprobated, curst,
> And fitted for destruction, from the first -
> .....
> Supralapsarian system this, the case
> Which these, so far deluded, souls embrace".[2]

In reviewing Byrom's attack upon the Calvinistic system of theology, it is evident that while he has pounced upon its weak points, he is scarcely fair to it as a whole. Calvin had set out to relate the various aspects of Christian thought, grouping them round the Sovereign Majesty of God, as McGiffert says "Standing by itself, the doctrine of absolute and unconditioned predestination would probably not long have found general acceptance, and would unquestionably have been crowded into the background by other interests, as in Lutheranism. But Calvin gave it an essential place in a system whose controlling principle was the majesty and the might of God".[3] And again in Dr.Taylor's footnote "One is reminded of the observation of Ritschl that the identity of the forgiveness of sins, justification, reconciliation, and admission to communion with God 'receives really classic expression in Calvin', despite the distinctions drawn elsewhere in his discussions."[4] Calvin's was perhaps a bold experiment, to find a universal law running through all life. Byrom's self-imposed task was to point out the exceptions to this law, so as to discredit it. Nor did he give due consideration to

1. On Church Communion Poems Vol.2 p.438.
2. The Dogma of Reprobation Poems Vol.3 p.131.
3. Protestant thought before Kant. McGiffert p.87.
4. Forgiveness and Reconciliation Vincent Taylor p.29.

the motives and practical effects of Calvinism. One need not subscribe to all its tenets to feel that Byrom's interpretation and criticisms give a distorted picture of a gloomy, cruel, and irrational creed. In point of fact it produced Christians who were just as radiant as those who embracedthe creed of Arminianism. It has been noted how deeply Calvinism was grounded in Scripture, and it has also been pointed out that there is nothing gloomy about the Scripture references upon which it is built. The point is well put as follows "He has not begun without purpose to finish; and this is true not only of his work as a whole, but of his work in individuals, - he intended it, and intends to complete it (Eph.1 $^{4-5}$; Phil.1 ^{6}). It is forecrdained that his children shall be made like Jesus (Rom.8 ^{29}). These predestined certainties are not announced in order to perplex men, but in order to give sure foundation for hope and comfort to those who trust in the grace of God. The predestination that we find in Scripture is a joyful and reassuring reality".[1] This buoyancy found its practical counterpart in the zeal of the Calvinistic Independents and Calvinistic Methodists, especially was this true in the case of that ardent evangelist, George Whitefield. Besides, one would imagine from Byrom's account of it, that the doctrine of reprobation was the all important feature of John Calvin's work, whereas it was only a necessary offshoot from his system. Dr.Sidney Cave makes this point in his chapter "Calvinism and its Critics", when he writes "Calvin's supreme interest was not the predestination of man but the Sovereignty of God and the demonstration of His glory in every department of life".[2] We might expect that Byrom, who owed so much in his own religious experience to Mystics whose leanings were in the direction of the Roman Catholic Church, should pay little attention to the Protestant motive behind Calvin's argument. The latter sought to guarantee the sole activity of God in the work of redemption; if the doctrine of human merit was not to creep back into Reformed theology, the only adequate safeguard seemed to be, the doctrine of predestination. In his judgments, Byrom makes no allowance for these factors.

1. An Outline of Christian Theology W.N.Clarke p.145.
2. The Christian Estimate of Man. Sidney Cave p.143.

If, as Canon Overton declares, nothing new in the way of theological thought emerged from the famous controversy between Wesley and Toplady[1], it would be very strange if we were to find new strands of truth in Byrom's writings upon it. Previously it has been stated that Byrom usually saw so many sides to a question that it was difficult for him to be aggressively definite about any one of them, but over this Calvinistic controversy he was very sure that his theological opponents were wrong. In his mind there was no difficulty in the problem, and no mystery, except in the love of God. It can be claimed that his theological position had some bearing on the Deistic controversy of the times, but an examination of this point is called for at a later stage in our enquiry.

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(6) Redemption

To complete our survey of John Byrom's religious thought, some examination must be given of his views concerning the Redeeming Work of Christ. He gave very close attention to this subject throughout his lifetime, and frequently he returns to it in his works. The importance which he attached to this particular doctrine may be judged from an extract which occurs in one of his longer poems:

> "That quickening Spirit to a poor dead soul -
> Not part of Scripture Doctrine, but the whole;
> Which writers, figuring away, have left
> A mere dead letter, of all sense bereft -
> But, for that only help of man forlorn,
> The incarnation of the Virgin-born." [2]

That this subject receives such close attention is worthy of note, in view of Byrom's enthusiasm for the Mystical interpretation of religious experience. Not that his mysticism is kept apart and is without relationship to his thought on Redemption; but an emphasis on the former has often caused less attention to be paid to the latter. There is obviously no necessity that this should be so, but ecclesiastical history shows that where emphasis has been placed on the mystical aspects of religion, then the objective view of the Work of Christ has tended to recede. A modern example of this trend can

2. An Epistle to a Gentleman in the Temple. Poems Vol.2 p.161.
1. See "English Church in the 18th Century" pp.355-7 Abbey & Overton.

be seen in the religious work and outlook of the Oxford Group. On the other hand,the obverse truth may be perceived in the theology of the Presbyterian Churches, where considerable emphasis is laid on the Bible as the Word of God and on the necessity of the Cross in the work of Reconciliation; in a word, on the objective approach to religion. But generally, Mysticism has found the religious atmosphere of Presbyterianism too chilly in which to flourish. Byrom avoided this tendency and gave due consideration to both Mysticism and the Work of Christ.

He found the necessity for the work of Redemption in the fact of universal sin and in the nature of the new life which resulted from forgiveness and fellowship with Christ. This sense of need, in Byrom's thought, does not arise from an overwhelming conviction of the effects of sin in the relationship between man and his fellows. There is no evidence that he raked the gutters of sin and was nauseated by the social depravity of his day. His conscience was not shocked into a burning hatred of the cruelty, injustice, and misery, all around him. Nor is there evidence of any grievous moral lapse in the respectable life of this godly man, no wild oats were sown in his youth causing solemn reflection in later years on the depravity of human nature. Just because of the nature of his religious experience - for experience modifies and often corrects doctrine, even that which is the result of meticulous logic - it is evident that Byrom regarded sin not so much as active rebellion against either God or man, but as the absence of good in life, like a hole in a stocking. Traces of this view can be found in such lines as these:-

" - He suffer'd ev'rything, that we
From wrath, by sin enkindled, might be free, -
The wrath of God in us, that is, the fire
Of burning life <u>without</u> the love-desire,
Without the light which Jesus came to raise,
And change the wrath into a joyful blaze." [1]

And again

"Evil, if rightly understood,
Is but the skeleton of good,
Divested of its flesh and blood
.....
So, by abuse of thought and skill

1. Meditations for Passion Week. Poems Vol.2 p.30.

" The greatest good, to wit, free-will
Becomes the origin of ill". [1]

In the subsection entitled "Our sins affect the lives of others", Professor J.G.Riddell writes " 'What troubles the Christian conscience' wrote Dr.H.R.Mackintosh, 'is neither sin committed by the first human pair nor the sin with which we are born, but the actual sinfulness of our acts and persons'. Our sense of guilt arises not from the past sins of others but from our own wrong-doing and the effects which our deeds will have upon ourselves and upon others"[2] He continues "The measure of our responsibility is to be estimated not only in terms of our own lives, but also in the light of a world in which men's lives are inextricably linked together."[3] This generalisation is unquestionably true of the great majority of people of all times, but in Byrom's case, possibly because of the even tenor of his life and the gradual evolution of his own spiritual experience, the foregoing interpretation of the human reaction to sin was only very partially true. He is much more concerned with Sin than with sins, and therefore would have agreed with the statement "Before the holiness of God we are not ashamed of our deliberate wrong acts alone, but of our sinfulness itself. We need forgiveness for what we are, and not merely for what we do." [4] It was this approach to sin which led Byrom to speculate so much on the origin of sin, even more than he speculated on its nature. Consequently he had very strong convictions about original sin and The Fall. He believed that at some point in human history the Divine nature had been lost by disobedience and wrong desires, posterity had accordingly shared in this loss, and only the direct intervention of God could restore the fallen nature of Man. This disobedience could not be regarded as a single act, for thus it would be too trivial to be fraught with such dire results, but it is an indication of man's desire to enter into a sensibility of the world's good and evil, in other words, a mis-use of free-will. In expounding this view of the Fall, Byrom follows his master, William Law, very closely. It is of interest also to note that such a view

1. On the origin of Evil. Poems Vol.2 pp.474 & 475. 2. What we Believe p.241 Prof.J.G.Riddell D.D.
3. Ibid. p.241. 4. The Christian Estimate of Man p.186 Dr.S.Cave.

also indicates Byrom's departure from a literal interpretation of the first chapters of Genesis. In his own words he explains his position:

"Thus, Sir, throughout the Burial Office run,
You'll find that it proceeds as it begun.
.....
Reason of all that's either sung, or said, -
Is by this one great solemn truth explain'd
Of 'Life in Adam lost, in Christ regain'd;'-
Lost at the Fall, - not at the end of years
That Adam labour'd in this Vale of Tears". [1]

This assertion of truth finds fuller exposition in his poem "On the Fall of Man", where he takes up the two points made by William Law, that Adam's disobedience was not an isolated act, and that the command of God, not to eat of the fruit, was intended for information:

"Of man's obedience, while in Eden blest
What a mere trifle is here made the test, -
An outward action, in itself defin'd
To be a 'perfectly indiff'rent kind,
Which, but for God's forbidding threat severe,
It had been 'superstition' to forbear!" [2]

Ruskin once declared that he was not surprised at what men suffered, but was very surprised at what men missed. He was thinking chiefly of what they missed on the aesthetic side of life, failing to appreciate the best in art and literature. Byrom too agreed with this sentiment, for he saw in the work of Redemption, a power which introduced men to a new and fuller life.

"Regenerating life, dethroning sin;
Working in more and more resigned wills,
The gradual conquest of all selfish ills;
Till the true Christian to true life revive,
'Dead to the world, to God, thro' Him, alive?'" [3]

This note is struck more positively in the poem "On the Fall of Man" in these words; -

"'Alive'? To what? Tho' Adam and his wife
Existed, bare existence is not life;
Nor death (the) loss of being, but of bliss:
Devils themselves exist in their abyss". [4]

These two factors, forgiveness and new life, in Byrom's theology, were to be obtained only in one way, through the Cross of Jesus Christ. The redemption of man was possible only by the initiative of God, by his own efforts man could not achieve goodness of life. This is hinted at in the lines:

1. An Epistle to a Gentleman of the Temple Poems Vol.2 p.150. 2. On theFall of Man. Poems Vol.2 p.521
3. Thoughts on Imputed Righteousness Poems Vol.2 p.492
4. Poems Vol.3 p.81. (Part 2 of "On the Fall of Man").

"More of true good, more of true nature learn
Than from a thousand volumes on the shelf
In one meek intercourse with Truth itself". [1]

It is stated more explicitly in the following couplet:

"Lesson for us is plain from Peter's case
That real virtue is the work of Grace". [2]

In the discussion of Byrom's thought on the doctrine of Election, it was pointed out that he held no brief for the belief in the Wrath of God. If God was love then it could never be necessary to appease Him.

"The Saviour died, according to our Faith,
To quench, atone, or pacify a wrath.
But 'God is Love', He has no wrath His own;
No thing in Him to quench or to atone.
Of all the wrath that Scripture hath reveal'd,
The poor fall'n creature wanted to be heal'd." [3]

Byrom no doubt gave too scant regard to the conception of the Wrath of God, being sensitive to the difficulties of a penal theory of the Atonement. Yet, no less an opponent of the penal theory than J.McLeod Campbell writes "But the wrath of God against sin is a reality, however men have erred in their thoughts as to how the wrath was to be appeased. Nor is the idea that satisfaction was due to divine justice a delusion, however far men have wandered from the true conception of what would meet its righteous demand. And if so, then Christ, in dealing with God on behalf of men, must be conceived of as dealing with the righteous wrath of God against sin, and as according to it that which was due: and this would necessarily precede His intercession for us". [4] Dr.R.W.Dale also has a word to say about the reality of the wrath of God, in his lectures on the Atonement "Although the temper of our times makes it difficult for us to believe that the anger of God against sin, and against those that are guilty of sin, can ever become 'a consuming fire', it is perhaps easier for us to believe that He is angry with the sinful and the impenitent than to believe that, in any real sense, He is hostile to them. Anger within certain limits is not inconsistent with love. Indeed, the measure of our love for others is often the measure of our anger against them when they do wrong. A comparative stranger may tell us a lie, and we may

1. Enthusiasm Poems Vol.2 p.197. 2. Peter's denial of his Master Poems Vol.2 p.246.
3. Meditations for Passion Week. Poems Vol.2 p.29. 4. The Nature of the Atonement p.116 J.McLeod Campbell.

feel nothing but contempt and disgust; but if our own child, or a friend for whom we have strong affection, tells us a lie, there is often intense anger as well as intense grief."[1] He goes on to say "He is not a mere 'good-natured God'. His righteousness as well as His love is infinite."[2] Byrom was quite impervious to this view of the Almighty, but he did pay due regard to the necessity of justice being done in the whole situation regarding Man's sin. In holding together these two ideas, first, that the love of God was infinite and therefore there could not be any estrangement between God and His son, God did not require to be appeased; and second, that God's love was holy, there was a Divine necessity that Jesus should die, he made a valuable contribution to religious thought on the nature of the Atonement. Although he emphasised the universal and unchanging love of God yet he did not regard the Cross as being superfluous, no mere superficial forgiveness was adequate for or commensurate with the problem of sin. This interpretation is much more readily accepted to-day than it was in the middle of the 18th Century, and credit must be given to Byrom in foreshadowing it. The position is admirably stated by H.R.Mackintosh, as follows "Holiness is the austere element in love, preserving it from wrong. We are able to speak separately of the two things, love and holiness, because in men they often seem distinct; but in God they are indistinguishable. There are principles of righteousness native to the love of God, and in dealing with the sinful He acts in harmony with these principles, not against them. Forgiveness can be taken by the living conscience only as it comes through judgment, and it is part of the Christian conception of God that He forgives in such wise as will not foster the seeds of evil within us. Hence in God's very nature there is what may be called a moral necessity that pardon should be mediated through active condemnation. He so reveals Himself in the cross that His mind about sin is unequivocally disclosed; the world is shown how awful goodness is".[3] In his own way Byrom brings out this point in his poem "Thoughts on Imputed Righteousness":

1. The Atonement pp.342-343 R.W.Dale. 2. Ibid. p.344.
3. The Christian Experience of Forgiveness pp.215-216 H.R.Mackintosh.

"Man had contracted in that fatal day
Debt so immense, that man could never pay;
He who was God as well as Man, He could,
And made the Satisfaction thro' His blood, -
Paid all the just Demand, 'imputed' thus
Our sin to Him, His righteousness to us." [1]

A further quotation may be cited from the "Meditations for Passion Week", under the section "Christ satisfieth the Justice of God by fulfilling all Righteousness":

"Man had departed from a righteous state,
Which he at first must have, if God create.
'Tis therefore call'd 'God's Righteousness', and must
Be satisfy'd by Man's becoming just;
Must exercise good vengeance upon men,
Till it regain its rights in them again.
This was the Justice for which Christ became
A man, to satisfy its righteous claim;" [2]

Byrom carries forward his thought regarding Redemption made possible by the Cross, to the consideration of how this saving work is apprehended by man. In a sentence it may be stated thus, from Man's side of the transaction, Redemption becomes available for all by penitence, and faith in Christ. A few short quotations will set forth Byrom's idea of the need for penitence.

"He fell from good, misusing his free-will,
Into this world, this life of good and ill;
From whence the willing to be saved revive,
Thro' faith and penitence in Christ, alive". [3]

"All hopes of good men, since the ruin began,
Were deriv'd from the Grace of this wonderful man.
His life, in the promise, has secretly wrought
Its intended effect in their penitent thought". [4]

"Sure of success may penitents implore
What God through Him rejoices to restore." [5]

This is a vital element in Byrom's clear understanding of the redeeming work of Christ; he steered between the two errors of orthodoxy and liberalism, the one which intellectualises the Atonement to the mere assent of certain doctrines concerning it, and the other which dilutes the Christian Faith

1. Poems Vo.2. p.491. 2. Ibid. p.31. 3. On the true meaning of the Scripture terms "Life and Death"
4. A Hymn on the Goodness of God Ibid.391. Poems Vol.2 p.377.
5. On a passage in the General Confession. Ibid.p.439.

to a matter of nebulous belief in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. "We are not saved by what we believe about God or man. We are saved as we respond to God's approach to us in Jesus Christ."[1] That response can only be in terms of repentance if we are truly to be saved. It is not a matter of making a decision to pull ourselves together to follow Christ, not the challenge of an ideal, nor the mere experience of frustration turning us to Christ as we might turn to any other help or helper, but the recognition of our unworthiness before God. That is the real starting point of redeeming grace in our lives. Professor Vincent Taylor puts it thus "The remission of sins it is recognised, depends upon repentance. Always an act of sheer grace, God's forgiveness is not largesse bestowed indiscriminately. God cannot forgive the feebly penitent, or those who are not penitent at all, because so to act would be to act contrary to His nature as the God of righteousness and truth. Forgiveness of this kind would be the removal of great barriers which man has barely seen, or has not even descried. It is only when a man cries: 'God be merciful to me a sinner'! that God can, consistently with His love, remit sins".[2] And if repentance is required to apprehend the Grace of God and to share in the merits of the Cross, it is this same Cross which induces true repentance. Man doesn't worry about his sins and cannot do so until he looks on that wondrous Cross. He has identified himself so completely with sin, that he is unable to be perfectly penitent, his capacity for such a state of mind has been lost. God Himself must begin the work, He must soften the hardened heart and enlighten the darkened mind. It must be remembered however, that there is still something in man which can respond to the awakening power of God, conscience has not been irreparably damaged, man's fallen nature is not wholly depraved. "Conscience is the meeting point of freedom and grace".[3] Nevertheless, the difficulty of repenting as we ought was felt by Byrom, it is the life of Christ which

" has secretly wrought
Its intended effect in their penitent thought";

it is the burden of Wesley's cry: "O that I could repent".

1. The Christian Estimate of Man p.223. S.Cave. 2. Forgiveness and Reconciliation p.234. Vincent Taylor
3. The Destiny of Man. p.168 Berdyaev.

Moberly too has called attention to this aspect of penitence, in these words "It is of considerable importance moreover for the truth of our conceptions about penitence that we should bear clearly in mind this fact .... the fact that we know every degree of penitence except that one which alone would realize the true meaning of the word." He goes on to say "But much as experience teaches us about penitence, it is important to remember that all the penitence realized within our experience, is of necessity imperfect penitence".[1] Of course, Byrom has in mind the kind of repentance which issues in a fuller and purer life. If it was merely an emotional sorrow for past sins, then it would be entirely negative in character, and a waste of energy. In this, Byrom, would have agreed with the "Healthy-minded" school of thinkers, his view might be summed up as follows " Christian repentance is much more than a lamenting of one's past sins; it is an active and fruitful reconstruction of the spiritual life, a development of a new consciousness out of which comes a new nature."[2]

Byrom completes his view of the nature of Redemption by propounding the Pauline doctrine of the Mystical Union with Christ. In this, he does not contemplate the absorption of the individual in the Divine, as some forms of Mysticism interpret union with the Divine, but rather the enrichment of the personality by the indwelling Christ. Such a union ensures an ampler life, no longer self-centred, but Christ-centred, enabling a man to be himself at his best.

"Salvation is, if rightly we define,
Union of human nature with Divine." [3]

and again

"That holy thing that saves a soul from sin
Of God's good Spirit must be born within,
For all salvation is upon the whole
The birth of Jesus in the human soul". [4]

In this way Byrom came to grips with this greatest of all themes. From the scattered nature of the references it is obvious that in no single poem does he formally outline a complete theory of the Atonement. Various aspects of

1. Atonement and Personality p.31. R.C.Moberly. 2. Heart and Mind p.121. S.G.Dimond.

3. A Hymn for Christmas Day Poems Vol. 2 p.18. 4. Verses written under a Print. Ibid. p.61.

the subject were considered at different times. That a coherent theory can be traced in his works is, however, quite patent.

To sum up: it must be conceded that in his thinking about Redemption, Byrom owed much to William Law, of which relationship fuller consideration will be required at a later stage. But if his thoughts were second-hand, his definiteness and convictions were his own. By going to the root of the matter and tracing sin to the Fall, thereby postulating a twist in human nature itself, Byrom kept before theologians the view of the depravity of human nature which was to find corroboration and amplification at a later date from the economics of Karl Marx and the psychology of Sigmund Freud. He also did useful service to theology by so definitely refusing to entertain the idea of estrangement between God the Father and God the Son, while at the same time he kept in view the holiness and justice of God, and so maintained the witness to the necessity of the Cross in an age in which this truth was strongly assailed. His insistence on man's response in the form of repentance is a note which still requires to be struck, even more strongly in our own day than 200 years ago.

Chapter V.

(1) William Law

Some justification is necessary at this stage of our study for tracing the relationship of John Byrom's thought to that of William Law, for Law never led a great religious movement. He never had more than a handful of followers and sympathisers, and despite Gibbon's statement, he was never a popular writer commanding a large public. He was too independent by nature and too much of a recluse ever to have the common touch. His great ability as a writer of first-class English prose claims for him a place among the immortals but he is known for his contribution to religious thought chiefly by his devotional classics "Christian Perfection" and "The Serious Call to the Devout and Holy Life". He is a lonely figure on the stage of history, about whom little has been written and to whom little attention has been paid. Nevertheless, as Canon Overton observes "William Law was a man who could hardly have failed to take a foremost place in any religious community".[1] None will be disposed to question his influence upon contemporary religious life. For example it has been shown how profoundly his ideas concerning the perfectibility of human nature affected the theology of John Wesley. J.B.Green writes "This work, (Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection) together with the Serious Call, which he published three years later, is not only the most famous phase of Law's literary activity, but is the teaching which found a ready disciple in Wesley. Yet it is possible to discern in its pages, not only the high conception of ethical Christianity which so powerfully appealed to Wesley's hunger for disciplined religious devotion, but the beginnings of the mystical detachment which eventually repelled him".[2] More important as evidence is the testimony of Wesley himself in describing his spiritual pilgrimage to the time of his conversion. He writes "But meeting now with Mr.Law's "Christian Perfection" and "Serious Call", although I was much offended at many parts of both, yet they convinced me more than ever of the exceeding height and breadth and depth of the law of God. The light flowed in so mightily upon my soul, that everything

1. The Nonjurors - their lives and principles. 2. John Wesley and Wm.Law p.38.

appeared in a new view. I cried to God for help, and resolved not to prolong the time of obeying him as I had never done before. And by my continued endeavour to keep his whole law, inward and outward, to the utmost of my power, I was persuaded that I should be accepted of him, and that I was even then in a state of salvation".[1] Nor can Dr.Johnson's Testimony be passed over without reference, for the influence of the latter in the literary world was as massive as his figure. Boswell reports him as having said "When at Oxford, I took up Law's Serious Call to a Holy Life, expecting to find it a dull book (as such books generally are), and perhaps to laugh at it. But I found Law quite an overmach for me; and this was the first occasion of my thinking in earnest of religion, after I became capable of rational enquiry".[2] Edward Gibbon's testimony is no less striking "Mr.Law's master work the Serious Call is still read as a powerful and popular book of devotion. His precepts are rigid, but they are founded on the Gospel; his satire is sharp, but it is drawn from the knowledge of human life; and many of his portraits are not unworthy of the pen of La Bruyere. If he finds a spark of piety in the reader's mind, he will soon kindle it to a flame".[3] Many other personages of less distinction made their way to Law's abode in Putney, to talk with him and to be influenced by him. The influence of a person can never be measured by his popularity or even by the range of his immediate personal contacts. The classic instance of this principle in the realm of philosophy is David Hume, who "influenced a powerful, though a small class".[4] In the realm of literature, Milton has never been a popular poet, his "soul was like a star, and dwelt apart",[5] but his verse has been a standard for the classical type of poetry for succeeding generations. In the same way we would maintain that William Law's influence upon contemporary movements was much greater than appears at first sight. He was the "Morning Star" of a change of emphasis which was to be felt both in religion and literature, from the rational and historical to the subjective and emotional in religion, and from formalism to romanticism in literature.

1. Works Vol.1 p.93. 2. Life of Johnson - Boswell Vol.1 p.33 (Everyman)
3. Memoirs of my Life and Writings - Gibbon p.15. 4. English Thought in the 18th Centy.Vol.1 p.2 Leslie Stephen
5. Sonnet on Milton - Wordsworth.

The relationship of Byrom to William Law is taken up at this point of our study, because of all the influences which played upon the life of Byrom, none can be compared to that of William Law. His first reference to him is not very complimentary. In a letter to his friends on 27th April 1713, he writes "There is one Law, a M.A. and Fellow of Emmanuel, has this last week been degraded to a Soph, that is, the year below a Bachelor, for a speech that he spoke on a public occasion reflecting, as is reported, on the government. ... He is much blamed by some, and defended by others; has the character of a vain, conceited fellow".[1] There was no further connection between them until 15th February 1729 when Byrom bought Law's "Serious Call". He read it almost at once, and by the 21st his conscience had been stirred by its challenge, and his interest aroused in its author. On 4th March he travelled to Putney in order to meet Law, so began a life-long friendship which was to have very definite results upon John Byrom's religious outlook. From that day forward, William Law was his spiritual guide and very quickly he developed a supreme regard for him. The effect of the "Serious Call" on the conscience of John Byrom was immediate and can be traced in his Journal. The comments which he makes, reveal the struggle of a soul newly awakened to a higher sense of duty, but unable to attain to its ideal. Law had written his book to show that the Christian religion had to do with the common duties of our ordinary life. This truth came home to Byrom's conscience with such force that immediately he contrasted it with the usual expression of religion in his own day. Writing on the 18th February he says "Mr.Law and the Christian religion, and such things, they are mightily out of fashion at present, indeed I do not wonder at it, for it is a plain calm business, and people here are and love to be, all of a hurry .... they have established a nominal Christianity and forsaken the practical Christianity".[2] The first attempt to apply the ethical teaching of William Law to his own life is recorded three days later, on the 21st, where he says "Rising this morning (7 o'clock) makes me sleepy but I must rise every morning soon, as my friend Law says, for it is shame to lie abed".[3] But so true to human nature, the pendulum had swung in the opposite direction on the following day, when Byrom

1. Remains Vol.1 p.20. 2. Remains Vol.2 pp.328-329. 3. Ibid. p.331.

sets down the sad truth "Rose 12".[1] Three weeks of trying had apparently produced no better results, for on the 10th March he says "Rose at 12 - why not sooner? - God be merciful to me a sinner!"[2] Byrom had found in Law one with whose religious outlook he was fully in sympathy, one who conveyed truth which carried conviction to his mind. This truth, he felt, ought to be more widely known and appreciated, and therefore he began turning Law's prose works into verse. Evidently Law thought very highly of Byrom's efforts for there are some appreciative references in the Literary Remains. Byrom reports a conversation with Law which took place in May 1743, as follows "He talked of the verses about the Pond, and of printing them with the other, but I said those about Enthusiasm would do better by themselves I thought, that I was only afraid of mistaking his sense; but he said I had only added flame to the fire, that the verses were very good ones, and so I promised to send them to him".[3] Others too were quite impressed "a very learned Deist" added this postscript to a letter written to William Law "I have read Dr.Byrom's poem. (An Epistle to a Gentleman of the Temple). I think it an admirable one; and was I to believe the Fall at all, it certainly should be his system of it, far preferably to that of the Bishop's."[4]

Byrom was delighted that Law was pleased with his system of shorthand, and by 9th November 1731 his veneration had deepened to this extent "I longed to write to Mr.Law, but it seems so like invocation of saints that I know not how to venture".[5]

These citations indicate the progression and range of Law's influence upon Byrom. No nom-de-plume was ever more fitting than Byrom's "John Shadow", with Boswell-like faithfulness he recorded his conversations with his master. These records, along with his letters, have been valuable to biographers and historians in re-constructing a figure who was known almost only by his writings and of whom there were few biographical details. His faithfulness is however more clearly demonstrated in his efforts to bridge the gap in the

3. Remains Vol.2 p.366. 4. Ibid. p.516. 5. Poems Vol.2 p.645.

1. Remains Vol.2 p. 331 2. Ibid. p.343.

Wesley-Law controversy. This was occasioned by an open letter written on 6th January 1756 by John Wesley to William Law, in which he attacked vigorously the latter's theology and mysticism, especially as it appeared in "The Spirit of Love" and "The Spirit of Prayer". Wesley regarded these notions so false and mischievous that six men who had been reading Laws works and expounding them were expelled from membership of the Methodist societies. The famous, or infamous, letter has been variously estimated, Whitefield regarded it as "a most unchristian and ungentlemanly letter", but more modern critics have been kinder and much fairer in their judgment, The point of interest for our investigation is Byrom's reaction to it. Though there is no reference in Byrom's Journal at that particular time, Charles Wesley records a conversation which took place on 21st October, 1756, when the "open letter" was discussed: he writes "I drank tea with Dr.Byrom, and was hard put to it to defend my brother's book against Mr.Law. We got at last to a better subject, and parted, not without blessing".[1] On two or possibly three occasions he reasoned with John Wesley in an endeavour to bring him "to repent of that wicked letter". Unfortunately he met with little success and in July 1757 had to confess "I could get nothing from him but that - if he lived to publish another edition he would soften some expressions in it, - which I did not accept of. Mr.Law, I apprehend, does not choose himself to take notice of it, or that anybody else should".[2]
A further conversation took place just a week before Law's death on 2nd April, 1761, for two hours he talked with Wesley and Mr.Philips and did not mince his words in defending his friend. There is a suggestion that Wesley and Byrom must have discussed the matter in 1759, for the Journal record reads as follows "We had again the talk about his letter to Mr.Law, but to no other effect than two years ago".[3] His censure of Wesley was also framed in verse, charging him with distorting Law's meaning and being altogether lacking in the spirit of love and impartial judgment.

1. Charles Wesley's Journal Vol.2 p.129.
2. Remains Vol.2 p.593.
3. Remains Vol.2 p.629.

"Now, after daring to refrain so long,
Surely, beginning at the End was wrong.
To hunt for queries these two pieces o'er,
Without regard to aught laid down before,
Looks rather like the Purpose of a Mind
On quest of meanings which it wants to find,
Than such impartial Search to find the true
As fair Enguirers after Truth pursue,"[1]

To turn to an examination of the more specific instances of Law's influence upon John Byrom's thought, light will be thrown upon this relationship if unexpected attitudes, changes of outlook, and differences of opinion are noted. At once we are struck by Byrom's attitudes, which do not seem to proceed naturally from his fundamental notions and ideas. Take, for example, his attitude to classical culture, with his reservations and doubts concerning it. It seems to be in strange contrast to his cultural background and natural love for all kinds of learning. Law's attitude, almost of contempt, is well known and appears in several of his works. His attitude on this question had been foreshadowed as early as 1729 when he published "A Serious Call". Discussing the subject of education, he says "I am teaching you Latin and Greek, not that you should desire to be a great Critick, a fine Poet, or an eloquent Orator; I would not have your heart feel any of these desires, for the desire of these accomplishments, is a vanity of the mind, and the masters of them are generally vain men". He proceeds "I teach you these languages, that at proper times you may look into the history of past ages, and learn the methods of God's providence over the world".[2] In the last phase of the life and writings of William Law, this view became more pronounced. In "The Way to Divine Knowledge" - published in 1752 and paraphrased by Byrom - he puts these words into the mouth of Rusticus "The treasure of human reason, is the very builder of Babel. Whilst you are under the guidance of our own Babylonian Reason, you can have no good either from the Scriptures or the writings of Jacob Behmen; but will be hunting after Notes and Commentaries to help you to Notions, which only delude your mind with the empty shadows of knowledge".[3] He writes in "An Address to the Clergy", published in 1761

1. Wesley on Law - Poems Vol.3 p.138.
2. A Serious Call. Works of Wm.Law Vol.4 Ch.18. p.189
3. The Way to Divine Knowledge Ibid. Vol.7 p.93.

"The Law, the prophets, and the Gospel are the only treasures of all that can be called the knowledge either of God or man, and he in whom the law, the prophets, and the Gospel are fulfilled is the only well-educated man, and one of the first-rate scholars in the world".[1] Writing of "The Spirit of Prayer" Dean Inge makes the following comment "The former, however, is somewhat marred by the extreme anti-intellectualism which was part of Law's later philosophy. It was a reaction against the Deists and their opponents who combated Deism with its own weapons".[2] In the light of these citations it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Byrom must have been greatly influenced by Law in this curious attitude. How like Law in his "Address to the Clergy" are these lines ;-

> "The Christian Bard, has from a real spring
> Of Inspiration, other themes to sing:
> No vain Philosophy, no fabled Rime,
> But sacred story, simple and sublime,
> By holy Prophets told, to whom belong
> The Subjects worthy of the Pow'rs of Song".[3]

Closely allied to this was Byrom's belief that it was wrong to continue reading on any subject after the truth of the matter had dawned upon the mind, if the truth was not given practical expression or its challenge accepted. Again, such a curious attitude appears to be inconsistent in one who found it difficult to restrain himself from buying books. The explanation is surely to be found in the recorded conversation between Law and Byrom at Putney on the 7th June 1735 "He (Law) said ...that it was wrong to have too many spiritual books, that the first time a man was touched by the reading of any book that was the time to fall in with grace, that it passed into mere reading instead of practice else;"[4]

Another instance of Byrom's curious reaction is to be found in his poem "Remarks on Dr.Brown's Estimate". The immediate effect of Brown's "Estimate" was a stiffening of the moral fibre of the nation. What could be more in line with Byrom's earlier judgments than this attack upon effeminacy and selfish indulgence? Yet in his poem he interprets Brown's criticism as an instance of a clergyman meddling with politics and so degrading the clerical office;

1. An Address to the Clergy - Works of Wm.Law Vol.9. p.66.
2. Studies of English Mystics p.157. 3. A Hint to Christian Poets Vol.2 p.128.
4. Remains Vol.1 p.618.

"Women must pray; and, - if Divines can reach
No higher a Theology, - must preach.
This world - this Sea-bound Spot of it - may seem
The central Paradise, in Men's Esteem,
Who have great Souls; but Women, who have none,
Have other Realms to fix their Hearts upon". [1]

Dr.A.W.Ward's suggestion regarding the reason for the spirit ofthe poem is "Very possibly, Byrom's lofty conception of the clerical office, which corresponded to that delineated by his "Master" Law in his Earnest and Serious Answer to Dr.Trapp, may have taken offence at the worldliness not easily separable from the combative variety of patriotism". [2] Another possible interpretation is that Byrom, being a Jacobite, disliked Brown's patriotism, but perhaps both factors were at work in his mind.

Attention has already been drawn to Byrom's change of attitude towards theatrical performances, and in this too there are undoubted traces of Law's influence. Two years after their first meeting this change had been affected. Whether this influence was at work in this particular immediately after he had read the "Serious Call" is open to question. On the 4th March 1729 Byrom says "We talked about Law and the stage being unlawful, which I stood up for". [3] Evidently the discussion had arisen from Byrom's first meeting with Law on that day, and acquaintance with his views in "The absolute unlawfulness of stage Entertainments", published in 1726. Whether Byrom stood up for Law's views or for the lawfulness of the stage, is not clear, but in any case, his views had completely changed by January 1731, as we have already noted. The subject of Quakerism also engaged the attention of John Byrom very considerably. His relationship to Quakers and their views has been traced in detail by Mr.Stephen Hobhouse in "William Law and 18th Century Quakerism", and therefore the features relevant to our discussion need only be selected. The first record of Byrom's interest occurs in his Journal where on 18th April 1725 he states "Went to Anabaptists' meeting and the Quakers". [4] It may confidently be assumed that as Byrom was still a devoted disciple of Antoinette Bourignon, that her views in "A Warning against Quakers" would have some influence upon him. In January 1730 he wrote a humorous poem on drink, which, - after making all allowance for the fun in the poem - clearly indicates Byrom's poor opinion of

1. Poems Vol.1 p.447.
2. Ibid. p.441.
3. Remains Vol.1. p.338.
4. Remains Vol.1 p.120.

the Quakers and others mentioned in it -

"Hence Presbyterians, Independents, Quakers,
And such like prim Salvation-undertakers". [1]

In the late September or early October of the same year he categorically sets forth his position with regard to the Quakers. One of their number, a certain E.Lampe, had challenged him to a debate on Quakerism, to take place at Stockport. Byrom declined and replied courteously, gave his views on Quakerism and then went on to say "I am far from being an enemy of the quakers because of their name 'quaker'. It is their life, their love of the world, their wisdom as to this generation, their luxury, and neglect of that Spirit which they particularly pretend to , which I blame in a quaker as well as in myself and others." [2] A practical expression of Byrom's suspicion of Quaker doctrine and practice is seen in his handling of the Fanny Henshaw case. In the last three months of the year 1736 this determined and headstrong young woman engaged in frequent correspondence with Byrom . She had decided to join the Society of Friends, and Byrom did all in his power to dissuade her, he even called in his friend William Law to help in the case, but without success. Yet in a letter to his wife on 15th March 1739 he writes "I had an evening last night more agreeable at Mr.Glover's, who asked me to come there to meet one Martin, a Quaker that teaches his little girl to write, and comes often to this coffee-house, and is a very honest, sensible man, and entertained the company very agreeably, though they could not enter into his notions. There was Mr.Taylor White and a gentleman of Gray's Inn, and they three against the Quaker and me, whose main principles suited together and were opposed by them". [3] There had certainly been a transformation of opinion in the interval of two years. This might cause no surprise were it not for the fact that precisely the same transformation occurred in William Law's attitude. From the year 1737 there was a change from theological hostility to genuine respect. Hobhouse writes "It is at any rate noticeable that in the second tract against Rev.Dr.Trapp, published in the same year as the last(1737), Law refers to George Fox with studious respect". [4]

1. Remains Vol.1 p.418. 2. Poems Vol.2. Appendix V p.593
3. Remains Vol.2 p.240. 4. William Law and 18th Century Quakerism p.244.

It is only necessary to compare the thought of the "Three Letters to the Bishop of Bangor", published in 1717, with the thought contained in "The Spirit of Prayer", published in 1749, to realise how much Law's opinions had changed. In the second Bangorian letter he writes "For why can we not change the sacraments? Is it not, because they are only sacraments, and operate as they are instituted by the Holy Ghost? Because they are useless, ineffectual rites without His authority? And does not the same reason hold as well for the Order of the clergy? Does not the same Scripture tell us, they are equally instituted by the Holy Ghost, and oblige only by virtue of His authority? How absurd is it therefore, to pretend to abolish, or depart from the settled Order of the clergy, to make new orders, and think any God's ministers, unless we had His authority and could make new sacraments or a new religion?"[1] Compare this extract with the following citation from the "Spirit of Prayer" "Accustom thyself to the holy service of this inward temple; in the midst of it is the fountain of living water, of which thou mayst drink and live for ever. ... There the birth, the life, the sufferings, the death, the resurrection, and ascension of Christ, are not merely remembered, but inwardly found and enjoyed as the real states of thy soul, which has followed Christ in the regeneration. When once thou art well grounded in this inward worship, thou wilt have learnt to live unto God above time and place; for every day will be Sunday to thee, and wherever thou goest, thou wilt have a priest, a church, and an altar along with thee".[2] It was this movement in Law's thought towards Quakerism that Wesley criticised so severely in his letter of 1756. Pouncing upon the implications of the above passage, he says "I could most easily believe it, if I did not believe the Bible. .... extremely dangerous therefore is this other Gospel, which leads quite wide of the Gospel of Christ".[3] Law had come to the conclusion that the Gospel was not helped by controversy, and therefore this partly explains his silence with regard to the Quakers, and his decision to refrain from publishing a treatise against them as it does also his refusal to reply to Wesley's letter in 1756, but the deeper reason was the growing influence of Jacob Behmen

1. Defence of Church Principles pp.102-103 Willim Law ed. G.O.Nash & C.Gore.
2. Spirit of Prayer ; 5. 3. Wesley's Works Vol.9 p.483
Works Vol.7 p.35

upon his thought. To quote from Hobhouse again "These ('not to enter into disputes' but to 'wish him God speed in everything that is good'), one can have little doubt were the uppermost feelings in Law's heart, when he put aside for good and all those sheets of controversy with the Quakers, which have been reserved for a Quaker editor to bring to the light ofday. A strong contributing influence towards Law's decision would be his growing absorption in the teaching of Boehme, whose doctrine of the inner light was not far removed from that proclaimed by George Fox and his followers".[1] Likewise, John Byrom was influenced by William Law to change his mind about the Quakers and at least to substitute an attitude of respect for one of hostility.

These instances of Law's influence upon Byrom's thought are, however, small compared with the total effect of his thought on mysticism. It has already been pointed out that from his early years Byrom was a devoted disciple of Antoinette Bourignon; a brief examination has also been made of the agreement and differences in their theological outlook. It is to be expected that Byrom would be willing to absorb teaching on mysticism from whatever source it might come. He did so by tempering the more extravagant mysticism of A.Bourignon with that of a more virile sort which was expounded by Law. While the latter had a great regard for the older mystics he spoke slightingly of Bourignon and Madam Guyon, and others of the comparatively modern school. He took the opportunity of expressing himself on this point in a conversation with Byrom on the 7th June 1735 who records it thus "It was not long before Mrs.Bourignon became the subject of his discourse, and he said much about her and against her; seemed to think that she had great assistance from the Spirit of God, but questioned much if she did not mix her own as Luther did".[2] In a letter to Mr.Walker earlier in the same year he outlined more fully his opinions concerning the Flemish mystic of which this extract indicates his fears concerning her teaching. "If her writings do not lead you into a disregard and neglect of the external worship, sacraments and institutions of religion, (which perhaps was not her intention,

1. Wm.Law and 18th Century Quakerism p.246.
2. Remains Vol.1 p.616.

though many passages in her writings seem to look that way) or if you guard against this she may prove a good instructor to you, especially since you so much approve of her".[1] This judgment appears to have hardened as time went on, for he became less tolerant of her opinions and was not prepared to accept the errors in her writings for the sake of the good in them. It says much for Byrom's faithfulness to truth and his regard for his spiritual guide that he should put the following conversation on record. "we went up to the high walk, when we soon fell a-talking about Mr.Walker, and how it was all owing to Mrs.Bourignon who was all delusion ....., mentioned a manuscript of Freyer's wherein it was said that he had sent her forty-five contradictions extracted from her works, he said that she was peovish, fretful, and plainly against the sacrifices of Christ".[2] Byrom was not in agreement with this, and put his own point of view, but the closing words of the record "I find much repugnancy in me to condemn her" suggest that the seeds of doubt had been sown in his mind. He was never weaned away from his first love, but Law's influence saved him from the more extravagant aberrations of Bourignon's mysticism. Despite the shift in emphasis in the works of William Law, from doctrinal differences to the ethical and devotional aspects of the Gospel, his influence was always on the side of institutional religion. It must also be remembered that when Byrom first felt the impact ofLaw's writings, the institutional and ethical emphasis was even more pronounced. On the other hand, while he sympathised with the mystical speculations of Behmen, he was not unwilling to remain in doubt concerning his theosophy, imbibed to such a large extent by William Law.

From our study of the relationship of John Byrom to William Law, it is clear that generally, where John Byrom appears to make an original contribution to religious thought, for example, his thought on the Wrath of God and the Fall, in reality he was echoing the thoughts of William Law. He added the impress of his own personality but the original inspiration

1. Ibid. p.559. 2. Remains Vol.2 p.105.

was Law. In the second place the form of his mysticism which in his earlier years had been modelled on the Mystics with Roman Catholic tendencies, gradually gave place to a mysticism of a more robust character, this was entirely due to the criticisms and writings of William Law. Thirdly, in thought and personal relationship, John Byrom stood between Wesley and Law, with a closer approximation to Law than to Wesley. But more important than points of agreement or disagreement was the tremendous inspiration which Byrom found in Law's writings and friendship. If he accomplished anything or made any contribution to religious thought, he might have given as a reason for his achievements the answer given by Charles Kingsley, "I had a friend".

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(2) Deism

It would be difficult to find any book which had reference to the religious, literary, or political thought of the 18th Century which avoided mentioning Deism or the Deists. Yet if it is asked "What is Deism?" it becomes clear that the word is used in a variety of connections and with a variety of meanings. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as "The distinctive doctrine or belief of a Deist, usually, belief in the existence of a Supreme Being as the source of finite existence, with rejection of revelation and the supernatural doctrines of Christianity". While this description indicates the salient features of Deism generally propounded, an examination of the views held by some of the leading Deists will reveal important differences in their doctrine. A contemporary writer, John Leland, who laid bare the weakness of the deistic position by acute and convincing arguments, notes this point in his reflections on the deistic writers: he says "Some of them have reckoned among the principles of natural religion, and which are of great importanceto mankind, the belief of God's universal and particular providence, his moral government of the world and of mankind, the obligations we are under to pray to Him and worship Him, the natural differences of moral good and evil, man's free agency, the immortality of the soul and of a future state of retributions. Others of their applauded writers deny several of these principles or at least represent them as absolutely uncertain".[1] Differences of outlook which to contemporaries appeared to be very pronounced have often seemed to succeeding generations to be superficial and perhaps unreal. But in an estimate of Deism, modern interpreters agree with the judgment of Leland. Whittaker writes "The deists have in common not any definite philosophical doctrine, but an effort towards a rationalistic criticism of the Biblical documents and an attempt to set up a primitive, pure, religion supposed to be prior to everything that is called revealed religion, and to contain all that is good in it, without the superstitious doctrines and the ceremonial elements with which it has become mixed".[2] W.R.Sorley supports this view by stating

1. A View of the Principal Deistical Writers p.504.
2. Social England, Vol.IV, p.777. Ed.Traill & Mann.

"The Deists were indeed a famous school of thinkers, especially in England in the eighteenth century; and yet it is not easy to give an exact definition of their creed, so as to distinguish it from that of their contemporary opponents. If we ask what Deism means, a perfectly clear answer is not forthcoming either from the Deists themselves or from their critics".[1]

It is true that Deists did not agree on their creed, but the broad lines of development and the cohesion of their system of thought can be observed from the time of Lord Herbert of Cherbury until Deism, as far as England was concerned, was swept aside by the Evangelical Revival. Lord Herbert, who is regarded as the Father of the English Deists laid down five principles or articles of belief in his book "De Veritate", published in the year 1624. These principles or Common Notions as he named them were as follows:-

1. That a Supreme Being or God exists.
2. That He ought to be worshipped.
3. That the principal part of His worship is moral virtue or the right use of our faculties.
4. That faults or crimes are to be expiated by repentance.
5. That rewards and punishments are to be expected, from God's goodness and justice, both in the present and in the future life.

Herbert regarded these as a sufficient basis for religion but admitted that they did not explain everything, he rejects neither the possibility of revelation nor the reality of particular grace. This finds verification in the statement "But when in a moment of intense faith we make a special appeal to God, and feel within us His saving power and a sense of marvellous deliverance, I do not doubt that the mind is touched by Grace or particular providence, and since some new aspect of God is revealed, we pass beyond the normal level of experience. I maintain in short that what crowns and brings to fruition the principle of actions which are due to the wisdom of nature or common providence, and what makes these actions pleasing to God, belong to Grace".[2] Nevertheless, while Herbert found some place in religion for

1. Moral Values and the Idea of God. p.450. 2. De Veritate p.311.

revelation and grace, the basis of authority for him, rested in reason. Thus, to quote Basil Willey, Herbert was "virtually, though not quite, breaking through from the theological thicket into congenial naturalism".[1] This was the way between scepticism and blind acceptance of ecclesiastical authority; men had neglected to identify religion sufficiently with reason. Accordingly he directed the minds of his contemporaries to the Socratic dictum "Virtue is Knowledge". He writes "we commonly sin through no other cause, but that we mistook a true good for that which was only apparent, and so were deceived, by making an undue election in the objects proposed to us".[2] In "De Veritate" he advocates a similarly lenient view of sin "a man goaded by the spurs of Venus or of Mars can be more properly charged with an excess of vicious humours than of wickedness. I have no desire to stand advocate for any depraved person; I merely argue that we should proceed with more gentleness in respect to those persons who fall into sin owing to some physical, animal, or almost necessary compulsion".[3] As we might expect in a rationalistic approach to religion, this feature appears also in later deistic writings. Herbert of Cherbury had provided the groundwork from which all subsequent deistic thought proceeded, and the following century witnessed the more detailed application of the principles already laid down by him. Almost at the turn of the century, in the year 1696 Toland carried Herbert's thought a step forward, and claimed that there was no place for religious truths which were beyond the compass of reason. As we have seen, Herbert hesitated to go quite as far as this. The burden of his cry was for the understanding of belief and the equating of faith with knowledge, which he supports with scripture references. He writes "If by knowledge be meant understanding what is believed, then I stand by it that Faith is knowledge: I have all along maintain'd it, and the very Words are promiscuously us'd for one another in the Gospel."[4]

1. The 17th Century Background p.132. 2. The Autobiography of Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury - p.38.

3. De Veritate p.180. 4. Christianity not Mysterious p.139.

Anthony Collins was more concerned with the superstition which had crept into Christianity, and with the puzzling differences of interpretation offered by the various sects. He asserted that it was impossible to arrive at the truth by way of the conflicting doctrines of the Church, the only hope was in each person thinking for himself. This is his lament "the Priests, not only of different Religions and Sects, but of the same Sect, are infinitely divided in opinion about the Nature and Attributes of God ....nor can we be easy in our own minds under the Prejudices and Difficulties which the Priests put into us against these Truths, (i.e. Belief, discipline, and worship of the Church of England as founded on the New Testament) but by ceasing to rely on them, and thinking freely for ourselves".[1] There is also a hint in his writings of another aspect of Deism which was to receive fuller treatment by his successor, Matthew Tindal, namely, that God did not require anything from man, service to God was possible only by service to man. Such a view necessarily struck at the roots of worship. This was the radical defect of 18th Century Deism, in making man the measure of all things, and taking no account of adoration, worship, or repentance, the God-ward side of religion. The culmination of the deistic movement can be seen in the publication of "Christianity as old as the Creation" in the year 1730 for Tindal was one of Deism's ablest exponents. He is very severe on the mistakes and cruelties of the Christian Church, he pours scorn on its sacerdotalism and sectarian differences, and criticises the lack of real goodness in the lives of its adherents. He attacks the trustworthiness of the text of Scripture, and suggests that the function of prayer is "to keep up a constant sense of our dependence on Him (God)".[2] Agreeing with Herbert, he stresses the belief that the escape from sin is to be found in a fuller knowledge of things beautiful and good. The judgment of J.M.Creed and J.S.Boys Smith is, that "Historical Christianity is not directly attacked, but the argument tends to show that revelation is superfluous",[3] and this is verified by this short citation "God never intended mankind should be without

1. A Discourse of Free-Thinking pp.98,99. 2. Christianity as old as the Creation p.44.

3. REligious Thought in the 18th Century - p.31.

religion or could ordain an imperfect religion,... There must have been from the beginning a religion most perfect, which mankind at all times were capable of knowing".[1] Thomas Chubb reiterated much of what Tindal had said, especially attacking the worldliness of the clergy and setting aside miracles and prophecy as confirming the truth of the Christian revelation. Revelation, to his mind, is unnecessary, the Divine character of our Lord's mission is questioned, and his divinity repudiated. Not only has Christianity nothing to offer men in their efforts to attain good-ness, but generally speaking, it has done positive harm. With this in mind he writes "Christianity has had a contrary effect, and instead of making men better, as to the moral rectitude of their minds and lives, it has really made them worse than otherwise they would have been, had they been left to follow nature".[2] From this skeleton outline it is apparent that while the main emphasis of Deism remains constant from Herbert to Chubb, there were important differences of detail.

It is not our province to appraise or to criticise Deism, but it is necessary to the understanding of the religious situation to note the causes which gave rise to the vogue of Natural Religion. The scientific movement of the 16th and 17th centuries had called attention to the marvels of Nature, the world was a great machine working by immutable laws. The discoveries of Galileo, Boyle, Newton and others, had far reaching results on the religious thought of later generations. They raised problems about the scope and efficacy of prayer, and about the place in religious thought for Divine Providence. To quote from Basil Willey "the fundamental impulse of the century was towards the 'explanation' of what had hitherto been mysterious; towards the statement in conceptual language of what had hitherto been expressed, or imagined, in pictures and symbols."[3] The Reformation also had some effect upon the rise of Deism, for in part it had been a revolt against authority, claiming the right of individual freedom in matters of faith. It had doubted some points of faith and brought them into the arena of controversy. Speaking of the relationship between the orthodox Churchman and the Deists, Whittaker says "Upon the question of the limits of free

1. Christianity as old as the Creation - p.432. 2. The Author's Farewell to his Readers - p.366.
3. The 17th Century background - p.119.

religious investigation, an appeal to the fundamental principles of Protestanism was common to both".[1] The challenge of the Deists was made against the authority claimed for the Bible. It must be submitted to Historical analysis and be judged at the bar of reason like other books. This attempt "to measure Jerusalem"[2] gradually became a challenge to the necessity of Divine revelation at all. An age of intellectual discussion was bound to produce its mead of doubt. Collins declared rather shrewdly that nobody doubted the existence of the Deity until Boyle lecturers had undertaken to prove it! The Protestant principle of the right of individual judgment in matters religious naturally gave rise to many different sects, and with them, a good deal of ecclesiastical strife and dissension. There were two reactions to this state of affairs, first of all there was the desire of Christian men to find some common ground upon which they could stand together, as Leslie Stephen claims as a starting point of Deism "As sects ramified, it was necessary to fall back further for a principle common to all; the same method therefore which caused Chillingworth to appeal to Scripture, implied an appeal to reason as soon as Scripture authority should be impugned".[3] Frequent reference to the weakness of sectarianism is found in the works of The Deists, indeed Herbert at the outset of his treatise asks, in view of the multitude of sects "where can an anxious and divided mind turn to find security and peace"[4], and Tindal also complains of the divisions of Christendom about trifles. The other reaction was a very natural trend towards toleration. Men were tired of the religious strife which had been such a marked feature of English religious life up to the revolution of 1688; Roman Catholic, Protestant, Independent, each in turn had found difficulty in appreciating the point of view of the others. But this sectarian zeal had almost spent itself at the beginning of the 18th century. The watchword of the century was Toleration, and in such a congenial atmosphere heterodox opinion could flourish. There was also a genuine desire to find a basis for conduct. Protestanism had destroyed the authority of the Church, Hobbes had made a vigorous attack upon the Bible as an authority for

1. Social England Vol.IV p.778 Ed.Traill & Mann.
2. Zechariah 2. v.2.
3. English Thought in the 18th Century Vol.I p.77 Lelie Stephen.
4. De Veritate p.75.

conduct, and therefore - to quote from Overton and Relton "The Deists went still further, and as they thought, deeper, and affirmed that behind the Bible and what they regarded as similar writings there was human nature and that the basis for authority was to be sought and found in the common beliefs of men".[1] Besides, in the minds of thoughtful men there was a growing discontent with the Established Church and its clergy, and a desire to sift the essential in religion from the non-essential. Deism was the expression of thoughts which were in many minds, "On the whole this was in fact very much what the age wanted to believe".[2] It must also be noted that pioneer interest in exploration and commerce had pushed back the frontiers of the world known to men of this period, and this in turn had stimulated an interest in other religions. The study of comparative religions had scarcely begun, but even a very imperfect knowledge of Eastern religions had its effect upon the religious outlook of Herbert of Cherbury who sought a common basis of belief derived from all religions, as he puts it "We must therefore see what universal consent has brought to light in religion and compare all that we find on this subject".[3]

The significance of Deism during the first half of the 18th century was immense; not that the range of its influence in England was ever great, for its appeal was too much to the intellect to be understood or to have any effect upon the uneducated masses, but at the Court and in the universities it was extremely popular. The Cambridge Modern History speaks of its having "immense vogue at Court; and it implied a vague monotheism for the educated few, with a very definite dogmatic system for the ignorant many".[4] Nor were its effects in England lasting, except in so far as the problem which it attempted to solve, namely the relation between natural and revealed theology, is still with us.

Our next question must be to ask how John Byrom understood Deism and to which aspects he addressed himself. In his middle thirties he became very interested in heresies, and his Journal abounds with references to conversations with Deists and to the reading of their works.

1. A History of the English Church p.35 Overton & Relton.
2. The 18th Century background p.13 - Basil Willey.
3. De Veritate p.121 - Herbert of Cherbury. 4. Vol.VI p.77.

This first-hand contact apparently did not engender a healthy respect within Byrom, in fact there are traces of incomprehension and contempt for those whom he regarded as being intellectually inferior. His first mention of Collins is to the effect that he "talked very ignorantly",[1] of Woolston on 19th February 1729, he says, "In short, I could not tell what to make of him"[2]; and of a less well known Deist on 15th March 1736 "Mr.Reynolds the Deist there, talked with me strangely."[3] After this date Byrom was more concerned with the predominant place given to Reason by the clergy of his day. Indeed, the orthodox apologists and the Deists had so much in common that there was an air of unreality about the whole controversy. Not that the charge of insincerity could be brought against either side in the dispute, but it was very largely intellectual fencing between opponents whose approach to religion was very similar. Bishop Butler is generally regarded as the chief apologist for the orthodox point of view of Churchmen of the 18th Century. His religious system was presented in "The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature", published in the year 1736. Butler's argument is directed against the claim of Deism that a Divine revelation was unnecessary. He defined the respective functions of reason and revelation and demonstrated that reason is the only faculty by which anything can be judged, including revelation itself. Revelation was necessary, for it supplied information which could not have been discovered merely by the use of reason. He writes "Christianity is to be considered in a further view: as containing an account of a dispensation of things, not at all discoverable by reason, in consequence of which several distinct precepts are enjoined us"[4] Nevertheless the whole approach to religion is rationalistic, every argument is used except the argument from experience, and reason is the ultimate test. These short citations illustrate the emphasis of the work "the scripture enjoins every moral virtue. In this respect then they (moral law) are both upon a level. But the moral law

1. Remains Vol.I p.93. 2. Ibid. p.330. 3. Remains Vol.2 p.15.
4. The Analogy of Religion p.177 - Joseph Butler (World's Classics)

is, moreover, written upon our hearts; interwoven into our very nature, and this is a plain intimation of the Author of it, which is to be preferred, when they interfere".[1] Again he writes "I express myself with caution, lest I should be mistaken to vilify reason; which is indeed the only faculty we have wherewith to judge concerning anything, even revelation itself".[2] What Butler did not admit was, that reason like intuition taken alone, is an inconstant standard. Its value will vary according to the knowledge and intellectual agility of the individual. Byrom saw very clearly that the ground taken up by the defenders of the Faith was likely to yield the same fruit as that of their opponents. By identifying themselves so closely with some of the tenets in the deistic creed they were parting with the very heart of the Gospel. In this particular, history has justified Byrom's contention, there was a Rationalism common to both which produced a formalism in religion and robbed it of its vitality. Speaking of Deism, C.C.J.Webb says "they were too ready lightly to part with what they were over-sure was not a vital part of the organism"[3], but the same might equally have been said of the clergy too. While Reason has undoubtedly a very important place in religion, by over-emphasizing it to the exclusion of other faculties, religion was de-personalized, as illustrated even in Butler's own religious experience. Von Hügel argues that "One of the spontaneous activities of the human soul, the Analytic and Speculative faculty, seems habitually, instinctively to labour at depersonalizing all it touches, and thus continually both to undermine and discrown the deeply personal work and world of the experimental forces of the soul".[4] It was against this and other tendencies in the work of the clergy as well as in the creed of the Deists, that Byrom wrote; his estimate or criticism of Deism applied also very largely to orthodoxy. Take for example the poem entitled "On the Redemption of Mankind". Our author summarises the argument of the Deists as follows - the only proof which the Divines have of the necessity of the Cross is to be found in the Bible. This necessity arises, so the clergy say, to satisfy an angry God. But this is at variance with justice and unworthy of a God;

1. The Analogy of Religion p.185 - Joseph Butler. 2. Ibid. p.200
3. Studies in the History of Natural Theology p.358. 4. The Mystical Element of

besides, God could have attained His objective some other way. - It is over the last point in the argument where Byrom breaks a lance, in his poem, with a clergyman whom he had heard expounding this view and producing arguments in its favour. The danger of such teaching is expressed in these words -

"It is at least incautiously express'd,
And leaves the subtlest of the Gospel's Foes,
The Deists, this objection to propose ,-
To which they have, and will have, a Recourse,
And still keep urging its unanswer'd Force.
'If there was no necessity', they say,
'For saving men in this mysterious way,
What proof can the Divines pretend to bring -
While they confess the nature of the thing
Does not forbid, - that the Celestial Scenes
Will not be open'd by some other means?' " [1]

From the foregoing short account of Deism and the realisation that the clergy approximated so closely to it, it will readily be seen how great was the chasm between Byrom's thought and the thought of this particular religious movement. It would of course be strange if he did not find himself sometimes in agreement with a movement which was religious and ethical in aim.

In our consideration of Byrom's thought on the Bible it was pointed out that he not only held it in high regard, but he believed that it was inspired. The Deists on the other hand belittled the claim to inspiration and challenged its authority to be the rule of Faith. Herbert of Cherbury had set in motion the critical attitude toward revelation, though he approached the subject with reverence and humility. He contended that if through carelessness or owing to the passing of time, errors had crept into the Bible, or if the ideas contained therein conflicted with Common Notions, such errors or ideas ought to be erased. Dominating the thought of his time as he did, Locke too accentuated the rationalistic trend. He was firmly convinced of the Divine origin of Scripture, yet Reason must be the ultimate judge on the question. Basil Willey writes "Locke, like a true son of his age, is so convinced that 'Reason must be our last judge and guide in everything', that he writes sometimes as if revelation were, by comparison, untrustworthy or superfluous".[2] The challenge to the necessity and the authority of Scripture rose to a climax in the publication of "Christianity as old as the Creation".

1. Poems Vol.2.p.477.

2. The 17th Century background p.282. Basil Willey.

Tindal maintained that Natural Religion had existed from the beginning and therefore revelation could add nothing to it. Byrom's retort to this position was, in effect, that religion was grounded in revelation and not in reason, and that this revelation was spiritually discerned, for there are spheres of thought where the reason alone is totally inadequate as an interpreter. He makes the first point in a poem entitled "On the Conversion of Saint Paul",[1] the second is expressed in "A Dialogue".[2] Mention has been made of Byrom's interest in a modified form of Biblical Criticism, he believed in applying his mind to the Bible critically but reverently. He is at pains to say through Theophilus:

> "Be not uneasy; learning has in me
> No foe at all, not in the least degree".[2a.]

and in this he agreed with the orthodox clergy and the Deists. Where he disagreed was in this, that

> "They think that now religion's sole defence
> Is learning, history, and critic sense;" [3]

A most interesting account of a conversation between Butler and Byrom is recorded in his Journal dated 28th March 1737 which has bearing on the relationship of his thought to Deism and Rationalism. He writes "We entered into a kind of dispute about prophecy, and I said I thought the Old Testament for prophecy and the New for miracles , and that miracles were the readiest proof, upon which rose an argument and talk about reason and authority, they being for reason and I for authority, that we had reason indeed to follow authority, viz. the consent of the Christian Church."[4] From this account it is clear that on the narrower issue of regarding miracles as a proof and confirmation of Christianity, he was at variance with the Deists. Writing of Hume's attack on the apologetic value of miracles McGiffert says "Critics of Hume are quite right in saying that it is not necessarily impossible to prove a miracle, that is, they are right if a miracle be understood simply as an otherwise unheard-of event inexplicable in the light of our present knowledge. But Hume was really concerned primarily to destroy the apologetic

1. Poems Vol.2 p.138. 2. Ibid. pp.318-319. 2a. Ibid. p.320.
3. Ibid. p.258. 4. Remains Vol.2 p.96.

value of miracles, and for that purpose his argument was valid, and has never been successfully refuted."[1] Professor John Baillie has also repeated this truth, a truth which tends to become lost sight of from time to time, "Supposing a man devoid of religious faith were to read in his morning paper that a remarkable thing had happened in a neighbouring city - a citizen who had died and been buried had, after the lapse of some days, and in agreement with his alleged predictions, appeared to a number of his friends and been engaged by them in conversation"....."if he satisfied himself that such an enquiry had been made, and that the evidence was indeed quite unimpeachable, then he would be forced to allow that a phenomenon of extraordinary scientific interest had occurred; a man who had been certified as dead by the doctors and had spent three days in a vault had (as foretold by himself) returned to earth alive and had again companied with his friends for a brief period before disappearing once again from their midst. But would he conclude, further, that the risen man must have been remarkable in any other respect, or that his ideas on things in general must have been profoundly wise and right, or that all men would rise as he did, or that even he would live on for ever? Or again, would his mind be turned in any way towards belief in the reality of God or in the possibility of fellowship with Him whether in this life or in glory everlasting? Surely the answer to all these question must be No ".[2] Just as Byrom believed that religion was rooted in revelation, he also believed that morals were rooted in religion. The demands made upon religion by the Deists were, that it should be reasonable, and also make for righteousness. Attention has been drawn to the fact that in one respect Deism was an attempt to find a basis for morals. But, both in the ethical objective and the means of attaining it, Byrom was opposed to the Deists. Let it be recalled how often Byrom stressed the virtues of humility, contentment, patience, and tolerance. Lord Herbert of Cherbury had also said that the principal part of the worship of God was moral virtue. Yet it must not be deduced that Byrom and the Deists coincided in their ethical outlook. The whole of the Deist movement was a rebellion against authority, which ill accords with

1. Protestant Thought before Kant. p.221.
2. And the Life Everlasting p.143

contentment and patience, shading off into resignation. The deistic documents were revolutionary in character, calling for a wholesale change in the structure of religion. At first critical yet constructive, they became more and more destructive. The virtue of tolerance was common to both, despite the occasional acerbity of the spirits of the Deists, for they too were opposed to the dogmatism of the Ecclesiastical authorities. It was chiefly in the means of attaining moral virtue where Byrom disagreed most strongly with the Deists and with the orthodox clergy too. J.Wesley Bready says "Deism plunged its adherents into an inflated optimism contradicted by the most obvious facts of life."[1] Byrom was convinced that men could neither be good nor happy by reason of their own exertions, it was not a new creed which was required but a new heart, not so much, clearer thinking, though that was good as far as it went, but greater spiritual power. He makes reference to this in his Journal on 30th April 1740. "If an acorn had free will, and should either pretend to erect itself into an oak without either soil or sunshine (as Deists, who trust to their reason without grounding it in God's word promise, or suffering it to be influenced by His grace, pretend to grow good and happy), or despising the dirt of the earth as long as the present frame of the world subsisted, should expect to grow into an oak after the conflagration, would it not be mistaken?"[2]

This need, in his opinion, was more likely to be met by a religion which was given the libellous label of "Enthusiasm" than by the cold critical attitude of the Deists. So much attention had been given to the intellectual side of human nature, both by literature and religion, that the emotions and imagination were frozen. These two elements were needed to translate the aspirations of men into realisation, they alone could provide the driving power so lamentably absent in Orthodoxy and Deism. Byrom had another answer to the religious bankruptcy of rationalism, in his thought concerning mysticism and the support he gave to it.
It has been noticed that the growing protest against the dogmatism of the

1. England - Before and after Wesley. p.40
2. Remains Vol.2 p.303.

Church of Rome crystallised in the Reformation, and likewise, the protest against the dogmatism of English Protestantism crystallised into the form of Deism. The latter sought to substitute an internal for an external authority, "Look into your own faculties and you will find God, virtue, and universal eternal truths"[1] says Herbert of Cherbury. Similarly, Byrom appealed to an internal authority, which made his religion much more subjective than the religion of either orthodox Churchmen or Calvinists. It is open to question whether Byrom fully realised the implications of his Mysticism as far as his Churchmanship was concerned. He was a High Churchman and staunch supporter of the Establishment, believing in authority, but his Mysticism did not run in the direction of orthodoxy. Indeed, it was one of the main reasons why he found himself so often in opposition to the clergy. Therefore, he agreed with the Deists in finding an internal authority, not however in reason, but in the Holy Spirit at work in the soul of man. He expresses his criticism of reason as an ultimate authority in the poem "The Self-Subordination of Reason".

> "My reason is I, and your reason is you,
> And if we shall differ, both cannot be true;
> If reason must judge, and we too must agree,
> Another, third reason must give the decree
> Superior to ours, and to which it is fit
> That both, being weaker, should freely submit.
> How, in Reason submitting is plainly implied
> That it does not pretend, of itself, to decide."[3]

It might be asked whether the same difficulty might not arise with regard to any internal authority. Not only Rationalists, but Mystics, Quakers, and all who emphasize the subjective aspect of religion have been faced with this question. Robert Winkler has said "The Religious experience without the vision of history would be empty, the historical event without the religious experience, blind".[3a] A weakness of both Deism and Mysticism was the neglect of the historical basis for religion. Byrom avoided the aberrations consequent upon such neglect by his passion for the revelation of God in the Bible. He was not content with what von Hügel calls "a petty, artificial arrangement of the human mind of the little which, there and then, it can easily harmonize into a whole," 4 nor with a pure mysticism which was

1. De Veritate p.121 - Herbert of Cherbury.
3. Poems Vol.1 p.569
3a. Das Geistproblem p.32 quoted by C.North in the Old Testament Interpretation of History p.xv.
4. The Mystical Element of Religion

independent of external evidences. Another point of comparison between Deism and Byrom's thought on Mysticism may be observed in their mutual tendency to abolish creeds and sects. A thorough-going Deism would sweep away every denominational barrier, there would be one simple creed, a minimum of belief, and one Church, if a Church at all. It is also apparent that Byrom's mystical approach to religion gave him very wide sympathies with all branches of the church. He was willing to learn from Roman Catholics, Moravians, and Methodists alike. He regarded with very great disfavour the exclusive barriers of narrow sectarianism. He writes:

"Doctrines wherein Redemption is concern'd,
No more belong to men as being learn'd,
Than colours do to him who never saw
The light that gives to all of them the Law.
From like unnatural attempt proceeds
That huge variety of sects and creeds,
Which from the same true Scripture can deduce
What serves each diff'rent error for its use:
Papist or Protestant, Socian Class
Or Arian, can as easily amass
The texts of Scripture and by reason's ray,
One as another, urge the endless fray;" [1]

It was the exclusive element of the doctrine of Election which caused Byrom to disagree so strongly with the Calvinism of his time. On this point he was nearer to the tolerance of the Deists than to the exclusiveness of the Calvinists. With both he disagreed in their conception of God. The Deists looked upon God as an Absentee Creator who had left His world to run by Natural Law, and therefore He was remote from man. The Calvinists in their turn thought of God in such terms of majesty and His will in terms of immutable decree, that here too He was lost in the clouds of Sinai. To Byrom, in Tennyson's lines

"Closer is He than breathing and nearer than hands and feet".

Lastly, how did Byrom's thought on Redemption impinge upon Deism? It coincided at least in one point, both Byrom and his theological foes, the Deists, agreed that there was no wrath in God, that was a fiction of orthodox theologians. When this has been noted, everything possible in the way of agreement has been said. It has been seen how the doctrine of Redemption is grounded in Scripture and history, but the Deists belittled the authority of Scripture and refused to

1. A Dialogue - Poems Vol.2 p.325.

keep their theological feet on the solid earth of history. Consideration of Byrom's view of sin led us to the conclusion that he regarded it not merely as wrong acts towards men, but as a wrong nature causing separation from God. He would have re-echoed the Psalmist's cry "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned".[1] On the other hand the Deists were concerned merely with virtue and right relationships with their fellows. They did not deny the fact of sin, but regarded it much more lightly than did Byrom. To him, the Cross was a dire necessity to be set in the heart of every person's life. No deistic Gospel of "try again", or creed of good deeds was adequate to deal with the problem of sin. Thus Byrom made his contribution to the removing of the dead hand of Deism from religious thought. McGiffert sums up the situation as follows "It is often asserted that in the controversy of the eighteenth century in England the victory was won by the orthodox apologists over both Deists and sceptics. Nothing could be further from the truth. The victory was won, so far as there was any victory at all, over both the orthodox apologists and the Deists by the sceptics, of whom Hume was the greatest".[2] That was not to be the last word, new forces were at work which were to engulf Deism, Orthodoxy, and scepticism, in the Evangelical Revival. Byrom's relationship to these forces will now engage our attention.

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1. Psalm 51 v.4.

2. Protestant Thought before Kant p.243.

(3) Methodism and Wesley

"In the whole history of the Church of Christ there has never been a more remarkable movement than Methodism or a more remarkable man than John Wesley, and the man and the movement are singularly identified",[1] so writes Dr.Henry Bett in the opening sentence of his book "The Spirit of Methodism". Whenever the name of Wesley is used relative to the 18th Century, the reference is invariably to John, for he was the dominant personality, the inspiration, guide, and architect of Methodism. Others contributed in no small measure to the movement, especially Charles Wesley and George Whitefield, with whom Byrom was on very friendly terms. His personal contacts with Whitefield and Charles Wesley appear from his Journal to have been much more frequent than with John, but as the latter gave the evangelical revival its theological and ecclesiastical framework it was naturally on his theological and religious practices that Byrom had something to say. The friendship with the Wesleys probably dates back to the year 1731[2] when they were at Oxford. At that time Reverend John Clayton, a mutual friend and a Mancunian, was studying at Brazenose and was associated with the group of earnest seekers after the holy life, which was led by the Wesleys. Both brothers began to learn shorthand from Byrom and wrote large portions of their journals in it. From June 1737 until after the epoch making experience which gave rise to the Methodist Revival Byrom was very closely associated with Charles Wesley, for there are several references to him in his (Byrom's) Journal during this time. On June 15th 1738 he writes of the brothers in very cordial terms "I have a good opinion of 'em from what I hear; their manner, as I am told, is to convince man of the true faith in Christ, which if they had, they would have all their sins forgiven, though never so great, the mercy of God being so boundless".[3] Thereafter Byrom became more critical as the Methodist movement gained momentum, and by February 1739 he could write "I walked this afternoon to Islington again with J.Wesley to Mr.Stonehouse's who came back with me to London to meet some of 'em, and we had much talk of like matters likewise, so one would think I should learn somewhat, but I suspended my judgment as far as I am able. I can talk with Mr.Stonehouse more freely than Mr.Wesley, with whom he differs in some points that he and I are more agreed in,"[4] and further, on 26th April of the same year "they have both together (the Wesleys) printed a book of hymns amongst which they have inserted two of Mrs.Bourignon's, one of which they call a Farewell to the World, translated from the French, and the other

ferences

1. p. 9.
2. See Wesleyan Methodist Magazine 1863 p.598.
3. Remains Vol.2. p.207.
4. Ibid. p.226.

(I think), translated from the French. They have introduced them by a preface against what they call mystic writers (not naming any particular author) for whom they say that they had once a great veneration, but think themselves obliged (very solemnly) to acknowledge their error and to guard others against the like, which they do by certain reasons that I do not see the reason of. I believe uncle Josiah would not approve of their expressions, some of which are very extraordinary." [1]. The name of Whitefield appears more prominently in the Journal during the year 1748, and on three occasions Byrom writes of going to hear him preach, in July [2] in the open air, and on 20th August [3] at the home of the Countess of Huntingdon, and on the evening of the same day in Whitefield's Tabernacle. The difference in disposition between Whitefield and the Wesleys would naturally incline Byrom to the former in prefer: :ence to the latter. Wesley often asserted that the converts of the revival should remain within the fold of the Church of England, and he himself continued to the end of his days as one of its ministers. But as Relton observes[4], it is ex: :tremely doubtful whether nine tenths of his followers shared this view, they felt no obligation to attach themselves to the Established Church. Besides, just because of Wesley's organising ability he welded the converts of the revival into classes and societies, thereby establishing the frame: :work of a potential Church. Whitefield on the other hand possessed no organising capacity and consequently there are very few churches of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion today. Unwittingly, Wesley was creating, in the eyes of

1. Remains Vol.2. p,242.
2. Ibid. p.452.
3. Ibid. p.458.
4. A History of the English Church. P.75.

Byrom, another sect, and how utterly he deplored this aspect of Church life ! His short poem entitled "Denominations" is most devastating and scathing in its delineation of the various branches of the Christian Church and indicates clearly his dislike of division.

"Churchmen are orthodox, Dissenters pure,
But Quakers are God's people to be sure;
The Lutherans follow Evangalic Truth,
But all the Elect are Calvinists, forsooth;
The Baptists only have Regeneration,
While out of them there can be no Salvation.
We form a Church (Compacted?) of the seven; -
'Lo, here is Christ ! lo, here the way to Heaven!'
Thus do the sons of England, Rome, Geneva,
Adjure by Jesus like the sons of Sceva,-
'Wanting the Love that should enforce the Call.
An evil spirit overcomes them all." [1]

A similar sentiment is expressed in a positive way in a section of the poem "On Church Communion"

"A Christian, in so catholic a Sense,
Can give to none but partial Minds Offence.
Forc'd to live under some divided Part,
He keeps entire the Union of the Heart,-
The sacred Tie of Love; by which alone
Christ said that His Disciples would be known." [2]

It has already been pointed out that this trait in his disposition arose fundamentally from his strong attachment to Mysticism. Therefore it is apparent why Byrom's friend: :ship for the Wesleys cooled off whereas he became more attached to Whitefield.

Nor was the bond of friendship strengthened by Wesley's open letter of 1756 to William Law, for Byrom, ever faithful to his friends, rose in defence of his spiritual guide. Nevertheless, despite the ups and downs of the personal relationships between Byrom and the leaders of the Evangelical Revival, his interest in the movement never abated.

1. Poems Vol. 2. p. 71. 2. Ibid. p. 457.

This was bound to be so for there were so many aspects of the movement which he admired and so much of its basic theology with which he agreed, moreover, wherein he disagreed, he did so most emphatically. In its beginnings, the Methodist movement seemed to offer to John Byrom a fellowship of kindred spirits for which he had been searching since his Montpelier days. It will be recalled that they marked the beginning of a pilgrimage on the road of Mysticism, a somewhat lonely road, not traversed by the majority of pilgrims. This new movement began by emphasising the very truth for which he had contended for years, namely that the only ultimately valid religion was that which was grounded in the experience of the believer. It was the immediate contact of the Spirit of God with the soul of man which was superior to the authority of either Church or Book. It was this concept in the mind of Wesley which, despite his own denials, has caused historians to include him among the Mystics. Linking Byrom still more closely with him was his declaration that spiritual things were spiritually discerned. In sections 33 and 34 of "An earnest appeal to men of Reason and Religion" Wesley asserts "till you have these internal senses, till the eyes of your understanding are opened, you can have no apprehension of divine things, no idea of them at all. Nor, consequently, till then, can you either judge truly or reason justly, concerning them, seeing your reason has no ground whereon to stand, no materials to work upon. To use the trite instance: as you cannot reason con: :cerning colours, if you have no natural sight, because all the ideas received by your other senses are of a different kind;

so that neither your hearing, nor any other sense, can supply your want of sight, or furnish your reason in this respect with matter to work upon: so you cannot reason concerning spiritual things, if you have no spiritual sight". [1] There was a warmth, too, about the Methodist movement which con: :trasted sharply with the chilly rationalism of the times, a warmth which was acceptable to those who favoured Mysticism and Enthusiasm. F.C. Gill commenting on this point says "Dr. Byrom, the poet, that shrewd friend of Wesley, put it succintly

> 'That which concerns us, therefore, is to see
> What species of enthusiasts we be.'

But subject to this qualification, Methodism fostered very considerably the revival of emotionalism in English life." [2] Here again Byrom would find among the Methodists, a congenial religious atmosphere. As time went on, these links holding Byrom and Wesley together gradually became weaker, for as one became more critical of Methodism, the other began to :attack Mysticism. There were several factors which made it almost inevitable that Mysticism should lose its attraction for Wesley. Those whom he had regarded with great vener: :ation "as the best explainers of the gospel of Christ" at a later date he came to abhor. Some of his reasons for this changed attitude are given in an introduction to a Volume of Hymns and Sacred Poems published by the two brothers in 1739. In this preface they accuse the Mystics of substituting holiness of heart for the death of Christ as the ground of Justification. They declare "Common writers suppose we are

1. Works Vol. VIII p.13. 2. The Romantic Movement and Methodism p.26.

to be justified for the sake of our outward righteousness; these suppose we are to be justified for the sake of our inward righteousness; whereas in truth, we are no more justified for the sake of one than of the other. For neither our own inward nor outward righteousness is the ground of our justification. Holiness of heart, as well as holiness of life, is not the cause, but the effect of it." [1] The second objection is lodged against the tend: :ency of Mysticism to promote solitariness in religion, the objection is stated as follows, "But supposing them to have laid the foundation right, the manner of building thereon which they advise is quite opposite to that prescribed by Christ. He commands to build up one another. They advise, "To the desert ! to the desert ! and God will build you up." [1] Numberless are the commendations which occur in all their writings, not of retirement intermixed with conver: :sation, but of an entire seclusion from men, (perhaps for months or years) in order to purify the soul." [2] This attitude, argues Wesley, leads them to a religion of resig: :nation and mere contemplation "the religion these authors would edify us in, is solitary religion. 'If thou wilt be perfect' say they, 'trouble not thyself about outward works. It is better to work virtues in the will. He hath attained the true resignation, who hath estranged himself from all outward works, that God may work inwardly in him, without any turning to outward things'." [3] The subsequent history of the revival under Wesley's leadership indicates how strongly he felt about these things. The practical express:

1. Works Vol. XIV p.304. 2. Ibid. 3. Ibid. p.305.

:ion of his beliefs was to be found in the emphasis which the movement placed upon fellowship and social activity. S.G. Dimond, searching for the psychological explanation says "The two principal factors in Wesley's rejection of this ex: :treme form of mysticism were his volitional and practical predelictions, and his social sentiment. He had been taught from childhood that salvation was only possible "by universal obedience, by keeping all the commandments of God." [1] In: :dividualist and autocrat though he was, Wesley realised that the individual Christian could reach his fullest development and enrichment in fellowship with other Christians and in the exercise of his talents in the society of his fellows. This fellowship, and the Scriptures would be the touchstones by which he could measure and correct his own experience, and so be saved from a distorted and unbalanced individual: :ism. Thus Wesley insisted upon the triune source of Christian experience, the Spirit of God using the channels of the Church, Bible, and Personality to make Himself known and to empower the soul of man. W. Bardsley Brash describes the view in these words "His theology was the theology of Experience, - personal experience which was preserved from wild individualism, because it was confirmed by the Scriptures and the experience of the Saints. There is meaning in the "we" in these lines :

> "What we have felt and seen
> With confidence we tell,
> And publish to the sons of men
> The signs infallible."

The experience of the lonely vigil was corrected and confirmed by conversations in the Society Classes". [2]

1. The Psychology of the Methodist Revival p.85.
2. Methodism p. 72.

With this, of course, Byrom agreed wholeheartedly, for we have seen in our survey of his thought on Mysticism that he also avoided the aberrations of individualism by a genuine love for Scripture and also by his regular attend: :ance at public worship; but he disagreed with Wesley's views of the tendencies of Mysticism, its effects, and desirability. He believed that Wesley was mis-judging the case altogether and afraid of hypothetical results which did not follow from it.

Byrom writes in his Journal on the 2nd July 1737 "I wonder: :ed where Mr John Westley got his notions from, (about the Mystics) for he mentioned Taulerus amongst the mystics from whom he was to take his description, and from private con: :versations, which private conversation, by Mr Charles Westley's sayings, I suppose, was Mr Law among the rest at least, but very ill understood as it seems to me. He defined the mystics to be those who neglected the use of reason and the means of grace - a pretty definition ! I told Mr Charles Westley that it was from the mystics, if I understood who they meant by that title, that I had learnt that we ought to have the greatest value for the means of grace;" [1] Writing later, on the 26th April 1739, to his son, he mentions the preface of Wesley's "Hymns and Sacred Poems" and its warning against Mysticism. Evidently Byrom was still of the opinion that Wesley was afraid of shadows. This difference in extimate was partly due to the fact that Byrom was of a reflective turn of mind whereas Wesley was intensely practical. The dangers of Mysticism, or more accurately, certain forms of Mysticism, were more apparent to one who was active in

1. Remains Vol. 2. p.181.

forming and establishing religious societies and also busily engaged in various forms of social service. Reference has been made to Byrom's attachment to the writings of A. Bourignon, In September 1731 he wrote "I grow so passionately in love with her that there may be need to check me a little." What could be in greater contrast than Wesley's opinion of that lady as expressed in his Journal on 14th February 1774. "In many ways there was a surprising resemblance between them (A. Bourignon and Anna Maria Schurman), particularly in severity of temper, leading them to separate from all the world, whom they seemed to give up to the devil without re: :morse: only with this difference, - Madame Bourignon believed there were absolutely no children of God, but her and her three or four associates:" [1] Wesley was not pre: :pared to give the common people of England up to the devil. The doctrine of "stillness", so necessary for the deepening of the spiritual life, had been perverted and debased until it had wrought havoc in many of the Methodist societies. The fundamental difference between Byrom and Wesley in their attitude towards Mysticism no doubt goes down to their con: :ception of what it was intended to do. To the former it was the most effective way of attaining personal piety and the experience of disinterested love for God, and necessarily following from it, happiness in this life and adequate prepar: :ation for the life to come. In the attainment of this ex: :perience Byrom was influenced by the writings of Fénelon, Archbishop of Cambray, and by Madam Guyon. Such lines as

1. Works Vol 4. p.7.

"What Helps to this a soul may want,
Pure love is ready still to grant,
But with a view to wean it still
From selfishness, mercenary Will.
Of all Rewards, all Punishment,
This is the End in God's Intent:
To form in Offsprings of His Own
The Bliss of loving His alone". [1]

The two dependent thoughts of happiness and aspiration to the future life do not necessarily contradict the thought of dis: :interested love, indeed to grasp at either for itself would be to miss them. Byrom of course made provision for these con: :cepts and as early in his career as 29th February 1728 he writes "This is my birthday. God who has preserved me all my life long, be praised for his innumerable mercies to me. May I make more suitable returns for them than I have hitherto done, and begin to live a more sober, righteous, and godly life, as one that has but a short time to continue in a world where men are placed to prepare themselves for eternity", [2] and on May 9th 1737 "Dr. Hartley spoke exceedingly well I thought upon the subject .... that the doing of good to others and not looking after our own pleasure was the way to secure the greatest happiness and real pleasure, which would come without our asking for it as a consequence of a virtuous be: :haviour in general". [3] It is therefore clear that the chief emphasis of Byrom's thought was theological and individual, his aim was to find the answer to the question "How can an in: :dividual soul most surely secure fellowship with God ?" On the other hand, Wesley had a passion for social righteousness, in his judgement the experience of individual holiness must be verified in "works". McGiffert puts it succintly ,

1. On the Disinterested Love of God. Poems Vol.2. p.398.
2. Remains Vol. 1. p.295. 3. Ibid. Vol.2. p.155.

"In thus recognising salvation as a present reality, Wesley was true to Luther, but his interpretation of its nature was usually different. His interest, like Spener's, was chiefly ethical, and he was more concerned in escape from sin and the attainment of holiness than in escape from divine wrath and the attainment of peace with God". [1] The rules of the Society bear testimony to this point. They were the simplest possible 1. Do no harm 2. Do good 3. Attend the ordinances of God; regarding which J.E. Rattenbury comments "That is to say, the rules were neither theological nor confessional, but ethical and institutional !" [2] "All that he required from the members of the Society was that they gave evidence of their sincere desire to flee from the wrath to come and be saved from their sins, by at least practising what decent worldly people called religion". [3] Of course Byrom was not entirely other-worldly, attention has already been drawn to his phil: :anthropy and personal kindness, especially to the poor. His sympathy was with the unfortunate, as can very well be judged from this record "The conversation turned at last upon the subordination that was necessary to be amongst people, and I contended for an equality, and for the poor people, and told Fazackerley not to love money". [4] But Byrom's religious thought would never have roused a community to clamour for social justice. In this he was poles apart from Wesley, for one of the important results of the Methodist Revival was the urge given to the examination of all social questions. Byrom's conversations and contacts were for the most part with philosophers, clergymen, scholars, and the

1. Protestant Thought before Kant p.166. 2. The Conversion of the Wesleys. p. 210. 3. Ibid.
4. Remains Vol. 1. p.490.

aristocracy of the land. He wrote for and against the in: :telligentsia of his generation, and though possessing no trait of class consciousness, his influence was felt within a limited circle. The letter of Mr S. Dunster is a propos to this point, he says "Sir: Though, like a truly Christian philosopher, you are continually entertaining yourself with speculations of the highest nature - with the first prin: :ciples of things, the nature of the soul, the perfection of man, the supreme good, and how far it is attainable by us poor mortals." [1] Because of his social position and mental equipment, Wesley too might have elected to use his gifts in a similar environment, but he decided otherwise. "His apostolic zeal was faced with the choice between two plans of campaign. They consisted of healing England's woes by starting at the top, that is to say, the governing and intellectual classes ..... the second alternative open to him was to address himself to the more ignorant section of the population." [2]

Byrom and Wesley were in perfect agreement regarding the necessity of the Cross, without which, the ideal life, whatever might be the conception of it, could not be attain: :ed. As to the nature of the factors demanding such supreme sacrifice, they had some differences of opinion. Sin requir: :ed to be dealt with, because of the Fall, Adam and his posterity had forfeited the Divine nature. So far there was no divergence of opinion, both believed in the doctrine of original sin, but even this dark view of sin allows wide latitudes of interpretation. It has often been asserted

1. Remains Vol. 1. p.537. 2. John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism - Maximin Piette p.415.

that Wesley approximated very closely to the Augustinian conception of total depravity, the Calvinists themselves took no more solemn view of the lost nature of man than he did, sin in his eyes was exceedingly sinful. Take for example this quotation from his sermon on original sin "few (that) will roundly affirm 'We are born with as much propensity to good as to evil, and that every man is, by nature, as virtuous and wise as Adam was at his creation'. But here is the shibboleth: 'Is man by nature filled with all manner of evil? Is he void of all good? Is he wholly fallen? Is his soul totally corrupted? Or, to come back to the text, is every imagination of the thoughts of his heart only evil continually?' Allow this, and you are so far a Christian. Deny it, and you are a Heathen still". [1]
The hymns of Charles Wesley underline the perilous position of the human race and the wickedness of the human heart. There is no mitigation of sin in such lines as these -

"Full of sin, alas! I am
But to Thy wounds for refuge flee:" [2]

"The people that in darkness lay
In sin and error's deadly shade" [3]

"Just and holy is Thy name,
I am all unrighteousness;
False and full of sin I am," [4]

Byrom was not prepared to go as far as this, and here he was more in line with modern thought than was John Wesley; although it must be remembered that the latter came more into contact with the coarser sins of the depraved and degraded sections of society. On the other hand, Byrom moved in a more respectable society where sin might be more virulent but not so obvious. In his Journal on the 18th May 1737

1. Works Vol. 6 p.59. 2. Methodist Hymn Book No.365.
3. Ibid. No.379. 4. Ibid. No.110.

he records a conversation with Woolaston as follows "I urged our freedom, and the comparison of a ship that might be got ready but could not sail without a wind, nor we move without the grace of God, that it was something good in even bad people that made us admire them," [1] The difference in thought regarding the necessity of the Cross is more sharply focussed on the question of the Wrath of God. We have already seen that Byrom was utterly opposed to such a conception, on no subject is he more uncompromising and on no theme does he wax more eloquent than on this. But if Byrom was emphatic, Wesley too left no one in doubt as to where he stood. He believed in the wrath of God and urged it as a reason for the Cross. The extract da ted 27th July 1749, from his Journal is very decided "I read Mr. Law 'On the Spirit of Prayer'. There are many masterly strokes therein, and the whole is lively and entertaining; but it is another Gospel. For if God was never angry, (as this tract asserts,) he could never be reconciled; and, consequently, the whole Christian doctrine of reconciliation by Christ falls to the ground at once. An excellent method of converting Deists, by giving up the very essence of Christianity." [2] This theological outlook is corroborated in Charles Wesley's hymns. The Wesleys must have been unaware that there is no single instance in the New Testament where we read of God being reconciled. [3] The curious feature of Wesley's sermons is this, that although there can be no doubt whatsoever that Wesley held tenaciously to the belief in the wrath of God, it is upon the Love of God that he rests his appeal, the theologian and the evangelist did not agree upon

1. Remains Vol. 2. p.163. 2. Works Vol. 2 p.145.
3. See "The Death of Christ" p.143f.- Denney.

the relative importance of the attributes of God, it was yet another case of a man being kinder and more sympathetic than his creed.

It has frequently been stated that Wesley was not an original theologian nor did Methodism make any theological contribution to religious thought. This is certainly true, but the same affirmation might be made of Luther and the Reformation, of John Calvin, and any other great religious figure. The New Testament contained the truth which had been forgotten, hence the contribution which each in turn had to make was to re-discover an old doctrine, burnish it, and set it forth. Men have always "turned back to see" the truth in the New Testament. Consequently Dr. Dimond is correct in saying "The special form of the appeal to experience which is the fundamental contribution of Methodism to the thought of the Church is the doctrine of Assurance. The genuineness of conversion, of reconciliation, of forgiveness, and of the soul's relation to God was determined by an appeal to one's own consciousness". [1] The doctrine of Assurance or Witness of the Spirit is plainly found in the New Testament, but unfortunately orthodox Protestantism up to 1738 had neglected it. After quoting the Westminster Confession with regard to Assurance, Professor Baillie says "Such a statement, far from making too much of the knowledge that one is a believer, makes (as it seems to me) too little of it. It makes assurance too little necessary to the normal Christian life, and this, on the whole, has been the tendency of orthodox Protestantism, as distinct from Anabaptism and Methodism." [2] This view

1. The Psychology of the Methodist Revival p.231.
2. Our Knowledge of God p.70.

finds confirmation in an admirable statement by Dr. Bett, who claims that assurance is fundamental to all reality, and that both the Bible and the Church are the products of man's realisation of the Divine revelation. The following short quotation gives the gist of his argument "Is it a fact that God makes Himself known to men? Then that is the primary reality in religion, and there are two sides to it - the action of God upon the soul of man, and the experience in the soul of man which realises the action of God. As in the general fact of existence there would never have been any experience of the universe apart from the mind of man, so in the special fact of religion. Unless God makes Himself known to man, and unless man knows that God has made Himself known to man, there is no possibility of religion as a reality." [1] Wesley at first believed that a convert should be able to bear witness to this experience and most of them did. It is not difficult to realise that a fount of joy would be released because of it, for we cannot be happy about anything of which we are uncertain. No wonder orthodox metres were quite inadequate to express in song the feelings of joy which were characteristic of the early Methodists. Nevertheless, it would be quite wrong to conclude that assurance was only a matter of feeling or emotional reaction, especially as far as Wesley was concerned. He did not halt to make a psychological examination of the intuition, but Dr. Sangster appears to put his finger on truth in this statement "This assurance is not well described as 'feeling' if feeling is thought of as some swelling tide of emotion. Wesley was not an emotional man himself and references to his feelings are

1. The Spirit of Methodism p.140.

not common in his Journal and Letters, once the Revival had begun. In fact, the desire to feel more is a more recurrent note than the actual expression of feelings, yet of feeling for feeling's sake he was justly suspicious". [1] Knowing that Byrom attached such great importance to the mystical inter: :pretation of religious experience, it might be expected that he would have hailed this Methodist emphasis with joy and perhaps have identified himself with the movement. Did Wesley assert the doctrine of Assurance more definitely than Byrom does in these lines? -

"Jesus, the Christ, the very Book has shown,
Without the Holy Spirit none can own;-
In Words, they may; but, what is plainly meant,
They cannot give a real Heart-Consent.
What Friend to Scripture, then, Sir, can displace
This Inward Witness of Redeeming Grace,
And rest the Gospel on such outward View,
As any Turk may rest his Koran too?
Nay, he can own a written Word or Work
That Christians do, and yet continue Turk." [2]

It is true that he was most sympathetic to the Methodist claim and he listened with interest to the testimony of those who claimed to have the Witness of the Spirit. Why then, does he adopt an attitude of incomprehension as though it was some new religious phenomenon, if he agreed with this Methodist doctrine, which after all, was New Testament doctrine? The first answer to this question is suggested by Byrom in his Journal of 7th February 1739. Speaking of faith with special reference to assurance, he says "I was afraid of their (Method: :ists) being fond of a peculiar expression for a truth that was meant by many others". [3] That is to say, it was a new nomenclature for an old interpretation of religious experience,

1. The Path to Perfection p.160. 2. Familiar Epistles to a Friend - Poems Vol. 2 p.264.
3. Remains Vol. 2 p.216.

offering nothing new and therefore calling for no new identifi: :cation. It even carries the implication that the Methodists were deluding themselves, believing they had found some new experience when in reality it was shared by others. Another possible explanation is suggested by an interpretation of Assurance given by Rev. Richard Watson in "Observations on Southey's Life of Wesley": he writes "Few divines have ever denied the possibility of our becoming assured of the favour of God in a sufficient degree to give substantial comfort to the mind. Their differences have rather respected the means by which the contrite become assured of that change in their relation to Almighty God". [1] He goes on to say "Some have concluded that we obtain it by inference, others by the direct testimony of the Holy Spirit to the mind. The latter was the opinion of Mr. Wesley; but it was not so held as to reject the corroborating evidence of inference". [2] May it not be that John Byrom was a little incredulous of a sudden assurance being given because his own had come gradually by way of inference? In other words, he accepted the fact of assurance but was doubtful of the Methodist path to it. For Byrom, Christian experience was a growing awareness of God. Even Wesley modified his view in later life, having come to the conclusion that the Witness of the Spirit might not be given at the beginning of Christian experience, but in some cases might follow later. This would accord with Byrom's experience. A discussion on Methodist doctrine between John Byrom and William Law gives us a clue to a third possible answer to our question. Byrom records "I asked in what their doctrine differed, he

1. p.99. 2. Ibid.
Life of Wesley - Southey.

seemed to say not at all, but that the difference was according to them, that we preach the thing or doctrine, but they have it". [1] It would be interesting to know how far Byrom agreed with this estimate. In any case, there is a note of wistful longing in his Journal entry of 13th August 1739 recording a conversation with Mr. Cossart "He said that Mr. Charles Wesley would have him go to Mr. Law, that he had been there, and Mr. Law had said that if the Assurance was right, he was far behind them" [2], and concludes "There every now and then seemed to be some deep and yet plain truth in his matter if rightly understood, and the words, Mira permotus simplici: :tate rei, came into my mind; pray God grant me this grace for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

"Dear Christian brother, I confess
I am a wretched sinner;
If you know more and I know less,
Instruct a young beginner." [3]

This is surely the yearning of one who is grasping at an experience which translates intellectual assent into a reality.

From the foregoing it is clear that John Byrom agreed to a considerable extent with the religious thought and theological tenets of Methodism in its early days, but that further acquaintance and consideration, and perhaps some working of prejudice, led him to doubt and misgiving. He was prepared to bless the efforts of the Methodists from above, but not to enter the fray himself.

With Methodist practice rather than with Methodist belief he found a closer alignment. He had his criticism to make of it,

1. Remains Vol. 2 p.268. 2. Ibid. p.265. 3. Ibid p.266.

but generally speaking he commended warmly the form of Methodist practice. Even Warburton, who gave no quarter to anything savouring of "Enthusiasm" wrote as follows "Commend me therefore to those honest zealots the Methodists, who spend all their fire against vice. It will be said perhaps, they are mad. I believe they are. But what of that? They are honest. Zeal for fancies and opinions of our superiors is the known road to preferment; but who was ever yet so mad as to think of rising by virtue?" [1], an inference which Byrom thought rather odd. [2] Byrom was much more sympathetic than Warburton and therefore more in agreement. In our study of his character we noted in his quest for piety the attraction which asceticism had for him, despite his natural inclinations in the opposite direction. An illustration of this tendency was found in his changed attitude towards the theatre. This outlook finds a very close parallel in the attitude of the early Methodists, who gave a new emphasis to the ascetic life. In their desire to flee from the wrath to come they frequently turned their backs on the desires of life. McGiffert gives a trenchant analysis and criticism of Methodist asceticism, in these words "Like the German Pietists, the Evangelicals were ascetic in their tendency. Their ideal was to live with heart set constantly upon the future, and natural human interest in the present world was condemned as irreligious. 'Friendship with the world' Wesley says 'is spiritual adultery'. The Evangelicals were not as consistent and thoroughgoing as their mediæval prototypes; they did not advocate retirement from the world and seclusion in a monastery. But they

1. Preface to the second volume of the "Divine Legation".
2. See Remains Vol. 2 p.537.

denounced many of the ordinary pursuits and pleasures of society, commonly looked upon as indifferent matters, and insisted that they ought to be eschewed by the Christian. Card-playing, dancing, gaming, horse-racing, theatre-going, elaborate dressing, and frivolity of all kinds came in for most vigorous condemnation. To be a Christian very commonly meant above all to turn one's back upon such employments. Thus there grew up an externality of religion and an artificiality of practice even more complete than anything witnessed in mediæval Catholicism." [1] Although Wesley did not oppose dramatic entertainments as such, he viewed with disfavour the frivolity and vice which he believed they encouraged. This opposition can readily be understood when it is placed against the background of social vice. The considered judgement of J.S. Simon was this "Weighing the evidence we have collected and giving due allowance for the reforms introduced by David Garrick, we see no reason to dispute the substantial accuracy of John Wesley's verdict, that the English theatre of his day was 'the sink of all profaneness and debauchery' ". [2] Byrom was attached to his home, his letters to his wife and children shed light on the high regard he had for the sanctity of the home and family life, so anything which was calculated to imperil or debase it, as vice always does, was suspect in his eyes. The abandon of the Methodist preachers in the proclamation of the Gospel must also have been a delight to Byrom, who apparently would have reformed the Anglican pulpit. He was intensely interested in the advantages of extempore preaching, and although not a preacher himself courageously

1. Protestant Thought before Kant p.168.
2. The Revival of Religion in England in the 18th Century p.79.

offered advice to clergymen on the subject. "To the Rev. Messrs Haywood and Haddon" he says -

"The hint I gave sometime ago,
Brethren, about your preaching slow,
You took, it seems; and thereupon
Could make two sermons out of one.
Now this Regard, to former Lines
Paid so successfully, inclines
To send advice the second part:
'Try if you cannot preach by Heart.'" [1]

With regard to extempore prayers he took quite the opposite view. Wesley of course was prepared to concede that prayer was just as real with, or without, a book, but his followers found a greater freedom in choosing their own words to express their buoyant feelings. With this, Byrom could not agree and gives his reasons in his poem "Forms of Prayer", from which this short citation may be taken

"And one who is dispos'd aright to pray
Will soon be heard, whatever it shall say.
It is itself the Form which God requires,
Ready to grant its well-conceiv'd desires;
Tho' with unutter'd earnestness it burn,
He, too, can make th' unspeakable return.
Suppose an heart in so devout a frame,
Will proper words put out its purer flame,
Unless just now brought forth upon the spot ?
Will reading quench it, and pronouncing not ?
Will forms, approv'd by Christian ages past,
If pure themselves, extinguish it at last,
And now Extempore invented Phrase,
With its continual variation, raise ?
For praying Hearts, the wand'ring scheme appears
Not so commodious as for itching ears." [2]

This point also must not be omitted, that Byrom naturally turned his thoughts into verse as others turned them into prose. A few of his hymns have graced the hymn books of almost every Church, and many more can be read with profit in his Works. Could he then be indifferent to a religious movement which found its most complete expression in verse

1. Poems Vol. 1. p.102. Ibid. Vol.3 p.106.

and song? There is a marked similarity between Byrom and Charles Wesley in this respect, that both declared their message and clothed their thoughts in verse. W.Bardsley Brash declares "The real compendium of Methodist theology is found not in Wesley's sermons, but in his hymn-book. Wesley in his preface to the hymn-book published in 1779 says "It is large enough to contain all the most important truths of our most holy religion, whether speculative or practical; yea to illustrate them all and to prove them both by Scripture and Reason". [1] So it was with Byrom. His Journal and Letters are entertaining and interesting, but his philosophy of life is found in his verse.

No great religious or secular movement begins in a vacuum, it has its prophets and predecessors, its greater and smaller contributors, and it is not too much to claim that Byrom had some part in the Methodist movement by preparing the way. He accustomed men's minds to the thoughts which Wesley was to expound so forcefully. His Methodistic influence was also felt in his own Church because of his friendship with so many of its clergy. It was given to Byrom not to lead a movement, but to help to make it possible, to criticise its aberrations, and then to doubt the pattern of its maturity.

1. Methodism p.76.

(VI) CONCLUSION

In the beginning of this study we set ourselves the task of enquiring how far Byrom was influenced by the religious forces in the early part of the 18th Century, and what contribution he had to make to the religious movements of his time. It was found that many forces were at work in this century which eventually altered the whole pattern of the social, literary, and religious life of the nation. But forces are not impersonal, they have their origin in the minds of men, and it has been claimed that John Byrom made a definite contribution to the formation of a new pattern of religious life which emerged in the middle of the century.

A short historical survey revealed two permanent and outstanding influences upon his life. The mysticism of Antoinette Bourignon made a profound impression upon him, converting him to this approach to religious experience. Byrom did not take over all the religious notions of the Flemish mystic, especially those relative to the Atonement He selected what he found helpful in her writings and suspended judgment where he could not comprehend. From the year 1729 the more powerful influence in his life was William Law. While the latter's views reinforced and generally confirmed Byrom's views concerning mysticism, he was opposed to some of Bourignon's theological ideas. Law's influence was on the side of institutional religion and he also firmly believed in the necessity of the Cross. It has been noted that by the year 1739 Byrom began to share the more tolerant views of William Law with regard to Quakerism, to which Antoinette Bourignon was strongly opposed. Further, Law's views on the absence of Wrath in God were accepted, expounded and vigorously defended by Byrom. These were the sources of inspiration for his religious thought as it appeared in his verse. It has not been maintained that he was a first class poet, but he was exceptional in treating such a variety of religious and ethical subjects in rhyme, and at least we found his poetry to possess the merits of simplicity and straightforwardness. In that poetry-reading age he was thus able to present his own religious opinions and those of William Law to a wider audience than he could otherwise have reached. His contribution to the religious thought of his time may be summarized as follows. He foreshadowed the modern view of the authority and inspiration of Scripture, by rejecting the theory of verbal inspiration and finding the verification of inspiration in his

own experience. Turning to the question of moral values, he emphasized the basic need of simple virtues such as contentment, humility, patience, and tolerance. In an age of rationalism he courageously wrote in defence of "enthusiasm" and produced a reasoned argument in its favour. With regard to the doctrine of Election and its kindred doctrine, Reprobation, while he himself appeared to miss the essential truth contained therein, he at least recalled theologians to a common-sense approach to the problems presented by Calvinism. He cut right through the formalism of that system and laid bare the perils of a theological edifice built round one grand principle - in this particular case - the sovereign majesty of God. A more positive contribution was made in his consideration of the Work of Christ in redemption. This led him to an examination of the origin of evil, which he traced to the Fall of Man. We have seen that he was opposed to the view that there was any Wrath in God while at the same time he stressed the Justice of God. It was a worth-while contribution to religious thought to point out that God did not require to be appeased, while at the same time His love was holy. His further insistence upon the necessity of repentance and faith in Christ, from man's side of the transaction, completes the salient features of his opinions concerning Redemption. To all these subjects he brought a reverent mind, saturated in mysticism, which in turn was the touchstone for his opinions on any other subject. It conditioned his view of the Bible, it shaped his doctrine of God, and therefore of Redemption, it was fundamentally responsible for his opposition to Calvinism and for his sympathy with Enthusiasm. His mysticism had no new truth to give, it has been seen that it was largely borrowed from Bourignon and Law, but it did help to prevent the fundamental truth of the Christian Faith from being lost sight of, namely, that the Spirit of God must find His abode in the human soul, if religion is to possess reality. These religious views made their impact upon the two most important religious movements of the time. The Deists rebelled against the dogmatism of the Church, and against the authority of the Bible and searched for a basic natural religion. The orthodox apologists in their turn took their stand on the ground of reason, in defending the Christian Faith. They won an empty dialectical victory, but Byrom opposed both sets of protagonists by claiming for religious experience the immediacy of the Spirit of God which vindicated the authority of Scripture to the individual. His firm belief in original sin, and the reasons he

brought forward in support of his case, were the grounds of his insistence on the necessity of the Cross, a necessity which the Deists did not understand.

Byrom also had a close relationship with the leaders of the Methodist Revival. The similarity between his views and those of John Wesley has been traced. Methodism emphasized the personal experience of the believer and the doctrine of the Witness of the Spirit, with which Byrom in a measure agreed, but Wesley's repudiation of mysticism was bound to cause a theological cleavage between them. Basically there was a difference of opinion as to the aims and objective of religious faith. Broadly speaking, to Byrom it was a means of attaining fellowship with God, in other words, the aim was definitely religious, whereas to Wesley it secured power over sin, that is, the aim was ethical. No hard line of demarcation can be drawn between the two views, but the emphasis is clear enough. Wesley's unwitting establishment of what to Byrom was another sect, was also looked upon with disfavour by him. Another factor which caused Byrom to grow less ardent in his appreciation of the Methodist Movement was the censorious letter written in 1756 by Wesley to Law. With Methodist practice Byrom was in fuller agreement, especially its ascetic tendency and its method of extempore preaching. Yet despite Byrom's general misgivings concerning Methodism, he had in some measure prepared the way for it. The theological positions for which he had stood were at the heart of the Methodist Movement. It was said of John the Baptist that "He did no miracle"[1], but he could appreciate those who did, and he prepared the way for his Lord, the great worker of miracles. It might also be said of John Byrom that he led no great Religious Movement but helped to prepare the way for one.

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1. John 10, v.41.

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